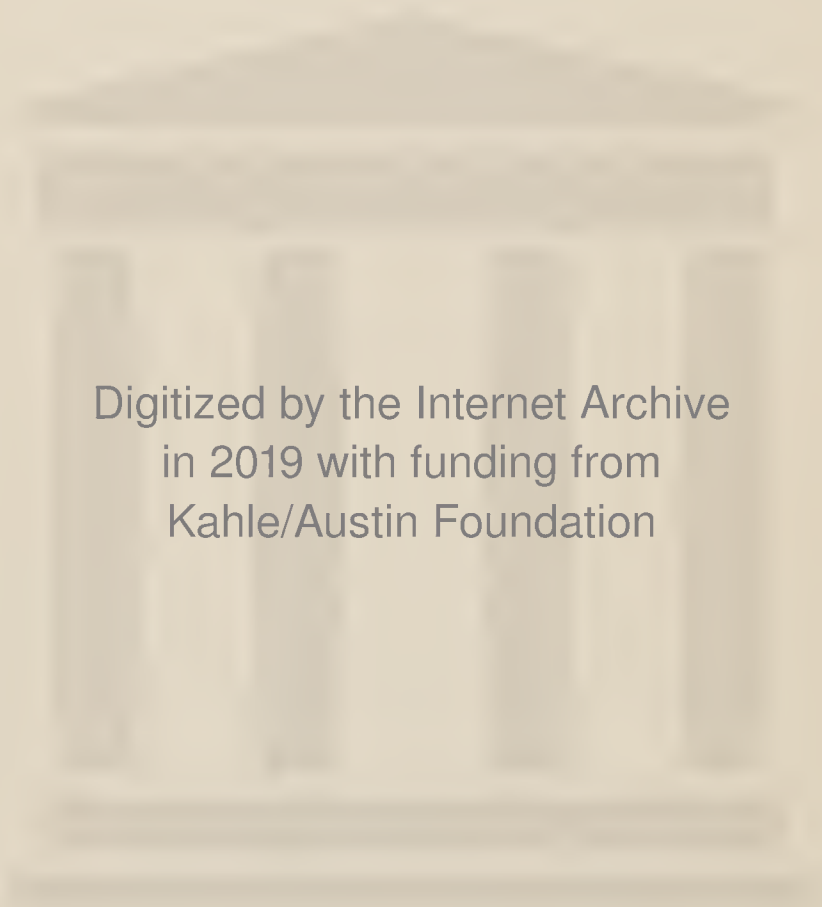
SEEING RED



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VI
VII
VIII
IX
X
XI
I
II
III
IV
V

SEEING RED

TODAY IN RUSSIA

BY

NEGLEY FARSON

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FOREWORD

KARAVAEV'S funeral passed below my window, too. I watched his scarlet hearse move slowly past the Kremlin. Inside the Kremlin was Stalin—the dictator—and yet his dictatorship was applying the principle of Communism. The G.P.U., after a secret tribunal, had just shot my billiards partner—and yet I was swimming in their bathing club every afternoon. Off and on I had spent three years in Russia under the Tsar. I was finishing another one under the Soviets. I could feel neither Right nor Left, but merely upside down. I knew by then that the minute I began to feel sure about anything in Russia I could be certain I was wrong. It was too easy to accept the symbol for the fact. The slogan they carried behind Karavaev struck me as being rather funny, but it would not have been funny to Karavaev or Krol or Guseva or to the old lady with the Hat. It was terribly real and so were they. That was Moscow in 1929.

N. F.

May, 1930.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	THE UNDER-DOGS	1
II.	A RED WORKMAN	6
III.	A RED WORKER'S HOME	10
IV.	MITKA'S KINGDOM	15
V.	COMMUNAL KITCHENS	21
VI.	WHEN A WORKER SHOPS	26
VII.	A WORKERS' STRONGHOLD	30
VIII.	DEFENDERS OF LABOUR	34
IX.	"STAND IN LINE"	39
X.	NEW WEDDINGS FOR OLD	43
XI.	THE STATE-RUN HOTEL	48
XII.	HUNGER	53
XIII.	THE HOUSE IN THE WOODS	58
XIV.	A PROLETARIAN TRIAL	63
XV.	THE SINS OF THE MOTHERS	68
XVI.	GOOD FOR EVIL	74
XVII.	PRISONERS ON PAROLE	79
XVIII.	THE OLD MAN OF THE PASTRY SHOP	83
XIX.	COMRADES AT PLAY	88
XX.	A NIGHT VISITOR	92
XXI.	THE MONASTERY	95
XXII.	THE FINEST IKON	100
XXIII.	THE WAR AGAINST GOD	105
XXIV.	THE VILLAGE WORLD	110
XXV.	THE OLD MILL	115
XXVI.	KULAKS	120
XXVII.	PEASANTS	125
XXVIII.	YARMOCK! THE FAIR!	130
XXIX.	PROLETARIANISING THE PEASANT	134

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
XXX.	A COLLECTIVE FARM	141
XXXI.	THE "RED LIGHTHOUSE": A FARMING COMMUNE	146
XXXII.	STATISTICIANS ON THE STEPPE	151
XXXIII.	YAROSLAVL THE BATTERED	156
XXXIV.	NIJNI-NOVGOROD	161
XXXV.	ROSTOFF	166
XXXVI.	TRAVELLING "HARD"	171
XXXVII.	"WINTER IS COMING IN MOSCOW"	175
XXXVIII.	"VOLGA! VOLGA!"	180
XXXIX.	THE VOLGA BOAT SONG—AS IT IS!	184
XL.	LIFE ON THE VOLGA	189
XLI.	NOT SO GOOD	194
XLII.	ALBERT THE AMBITIOUS	198
XLIII.	ASTRAKHAN	203
XLIV.	UPS AND DOWNS ON THE CASPIAN	208
XLV.	INTO THE COUNTRY OF THE KARACHAITES	213
XLVI.	SUNDAY IS NOT A MOHAMMEDAN HOLIDAY	220
XLVII.	CLIMBING THE CAUCASUS	225
XLVIII.	AMONG LOST RACES	230
XLIX.	AT THE FOOT OF THE MAIN RANGE	235
L.	LAMB À LA KARACHAITE	240
LI.	WOLF-FIRES	245
LII.	IN A KARACHAITE "KOSH"	250
LIII.	MEN—AND MISHAPS	255
LIV.	STYMIED AT THE KLUKHOR PASS	261
LV.	MAN PROPOSES	266
LVI.	THE NEW PRIESTHOOD OF RUSSIA	271

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

ANTI-RELIGIOUS POSTERS.

THE ARMY OF CHRIST ON THE MARCH . *Frontispiece*

PLATE — FACING PAGE

I. THE RICH MAN'S CHOICE - - - - 4

II. THE SECRET OF CHRIST - - - - 12

III. THE DEFENDER - - - - - - 22

IV. THE SAVIOUR OF THE WORLD - - - - 32

V. THE CHINESE SAMOVAR - - - - 46

VI. SIGHTS TO REJOICE THE PEASANTS' HEART - - 60

VII. THE TRIUMPH OF CHRISTIANITY - - - 76

VIII. HOW GOD TOOK ENOCH ALIVE INTO HEAVEN - - 86

IX. THE EASTER FESTIVAL - - - - - 98

X. THE PRAYER OF THE NEPMAN - - - - 108

XI. THERE ARE SIMPLETONS ENOUGH TO LAST THE LIFETIME OF A PRIEST - - - - - - 122

XII. ONE OF THE TWELVE GREAT CHURCH FESTIVALS - 136

XIII. THE GREATEST ACHIEVEMENT OF HUMAN PROGRESS—IN THE HOME MARKET - - - - - 148

XIV. THE ONE-TIME IDOLS OF THE PRIESTS - - - 162

XV. WHY THE BOURGEOIS NEEDS CHRISTIAN PROFESSIONAL UNIONS - - - - - - 176

POLITICAL POSTERS.

XVI. THE FOOTPRINTS OF REACTION - - - - 186

XVII. WHITE AND RED - - - - - 200

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

ANTI-IMPERIALIST POSTERS.

PLATE		FACING PAGE
XVIII.	" IMPERIALISTS ARE SUPPRESSING BY SWORD AND BLOODSHED THE ACTIONS OF EASTERN PEOPLES FOR NATIONAL FREEDOM. IT IS YOUR DUTY TO HELP YOUR BRAVE BROTHERS IN THIS STRUGGLE BY MEANS OF MOPR " -	216
XIX.	" YOU OUGHT TO HELP THESE BRAVE REVOLUTIONARIES WHO ARE STANDING UP AGAINST THE TYRANNY OF THE NATIVE AND FOREIGN CAPITALISTS " - -	228
XX.	" THIS IS THE WAY 'CIVILISED' CAPITALISTS ARE TREATING THE LABOURERS IN THE COLONIES. THEY HAVE NO MERCY EVEN ON WOMEN AND CHILDREN "	238
XXI.	" LANDOWNERS AND CAPITALISTS ARE OPPRESSING WITH SEVERE TORTURES THE HEROES OF THE REVOLUTION "	248
XXII.	" THEY ARE LEAVING TO ROT BEHIND IRON BARS THE BRAVE WORKERS AND PEASANTS WHO ARE STRIVING FOR THE FREEDOM OF THE EAST " - - -	258
XXIII.	" LET US AVENGE THE BLOOD OF THE HEROES SHED IN FIGHTING FOR THE REVOLUTION BY STRENGTHENING MOPR " - - - - - -	268

CHAPTER I

THE UNDER-DOGS

THE Proletarian revolution has been going on for eleven years, and yesterday I walked into one of the tenement buildings of the First Russian Textile Printing Mill and found twelve people living in one small room. There were six small single beds stretched around the bare walls. Five of them were each inhabited by a husband and wife. None of these families was related to the others. Their beds stood around the walls with no curtains between them. And if you can imagine five men and five women dressing and undressing before each other, in sickness and in health, month after month, year after year, you will perhaps feel grateful for the sickly glim of that one weak electric bulb which kept that kennel in semi-darkness.

I do not say that that room is typical of the living conditions of Russian workers. I know that the authorities are building dwellings as fast as they can. I have been in some of these " ideal workers' homes " in Kiev—too perfect (as are many things in the Soviets) in idealology and too few in quantity. I know that the workers in Moscow are agitating to have all the former house-owners driven out of their homes: Nepmen, priests, former bourgeoisie, members of the " leisure " class—what travesty !—and that they claim something like 200,000 more " living spaces " will be acquired for the

workmen in this way. But none of these things have any bearing on the sordidness of this and other rooms I saw in this textile tenement.

It was not that these workers were among the poorest paid hands. Each one was getting more than average wage. Four men were making £7 10s. a month, and the other man was making £10—and the average wage of a textile worker is about £6. But not one of them was a Communist.

It is difficult to state whether that was a case of cause or effect; whether they were getting the worst end of the living conditions because they were not Communists—or whether they were not Communists because they did not think they were living well enough.

"The Communists," declared one of these men, a lop-sided man with a nose that pointed across his face. "They're the ones who get all that's good."

"Then why aren't you a Communist?" I asked him.

"Because we don't believe them!" roared a man from the other circle that hemmed me in. "We have waited eleven years for our lives to improve—and nothing has happened."

"Yes," cried another. "I don't say that we want Nicholas back—but we want to live decent. You come into my room."

He led me into another slit of a room where five people lived—the average in this tenement is five or seven to a cell—and as we entered it a woman, lying in a dirty box bed, pulled the ragged curtains apart to see what this trampling of boots meant, saw me, and hurriedly

shut them again. Another woman, sitting beside a dirty bed in the far corner, just sat there and stared at us stupidly.

" Just look at that light!" demanded this disgruntled worker. " Look here!" He walked back to the door and sat down on the stool by his own bed. There was a bed-stand there on which stood a tin cup and kettle; and he went through the motions of pouring out tea. " I can't tell when my cup is full," he cried. " It's too dark. Now how do you expect us to live in darkness like this? Many times we have begged for another light, and what do they tell us—another bulb would use up too much energy. Phew!"—spitting. " Damn them, I tell you."

" But why do you say that the old times were better? In the time of Nicholas you also lived four and five in a room—I saw you."

" Know it, know it—that's true. Listen, I'll tell you what's worse. In the time of Nicholas when we wanted to leave a mill we went to the baren "—he snatched off his hat and bowed—" and we said that we wanted to go, and he said goodbye—and we went and got a job in another mill. Now if we leave this mill, we can't get no job. Leave one and you've left all of 'em. And there are 240,000 unemployed people on the Moscow labour bourse."

" Yes, yes, yes—we've got to stay here," said the lop-sided man.

We went back to the original room. When I had first entered, a man sitting by his bed was making a fishing net, and he was using a wooden net-needle exactly like those the fishermen use on the New Jersey coast. I

smiled as I told him this, but he did not smile; he was tying knots swiftly and grimly, and he looked up and said—" I'm making this for when I go back to my village."

The tenement had four or five floors—I don't remember which; and on each floor lived about a hundred people. And on each floor there was a dark kitchen with a big black communal stove. People passed up and down the halls carrying bowls of steaming milk, buckwheat, soup. One man passed with a tin pail covered with a cloth. Whether it was food or washing, I could not tell.

In the first room sat a peasant-dressed workwoman, white kerchief tied around her chin and head, blowsy blouse, belted, its tail sticking out around her rough dress, heavy felt boots on her squat feet; sitting on a stool by her draped box bed, her hands folded in her lap—the picture of lethargic stupidity and resignation. Her bedstand held a fryingpan with a slab of some grease and meat—waiting to be cooked on the communal stove. Her husband told me that their child slept with her, and, leading me out into the narrowing " hall " of the room, he showed me his own bed made of boxes and crates with all his worldly goods stowed away underneath.

In the room with five people there was an ikon and a dim guttering candle. These greenish plastered walls were bare, except for a damp spot in the corner which the man slapped with his hand. I did not wonder as I surveyed this grim cell that the matron of the dispensary said " Tuberculosis " when I asked her what illness was most prevalent. My only wonder was that

people could exist in such a murk. There were children running up and down the dark corridors, mothers gossiping in groups, their babies in their arms. And at the end was a meeting of the FABKOM, the factory committee, talking about " defending the rights of labour "—and that made me wonder most of all.

CHAPTER II

A RED WORKMAN

TO begin with, let me say that Lev Yakovitch is a Communist, and that that makes up for a great deal of what he would otherwise miss in Soviet Russia. In the first place, it gives him a goal, an ideal and a faith; and while it is permissible to doubt that faith can move mountains or even make the factory wheels of the Soviet Union go round any faster, it nevertheless does compensate a great proportion of the Russian population for the present rough road they are travelling. For the life of a Russian today is that of a man who is living in a house the same time he is building it. Even more, he is tearing down the old structure as he erects the new; he did not even have clean ground to begin with.

With this ideal and faith in the future (even though he may never live to see it fully realised) Lev Yakovitch can put up with hardships that would seem intolerable to the average Westerner. Sleeping four people in one room, living mostly upon black bread and tea, having only one or two decent suits of clothes, cooking warm meals twice weekly on a primus stove and warming them up for the rest of the week on the same beastly contrivance—and still he is happy. Much, much happier than the average clerk in New York or Chicago. I do not say that he is happier than the average Ameri-

can workman, because the American workman today should be one of the happiest men in the world. Lev Yakovitch doesn't think so. He knows, he told me, that the average American workman lives much better than he does—but then he has an idea that the American workman is producing under a capitalist bondage of some sort, and that he is always irking to throw off the yoke. Whenever Lev Yakovitch hears of a textile strike in Passaic, N.J., or a coal strike in West Virginia (and, believe me, if there is one, his Government-ruled papers see that he gets the details of it soon enough), whenever Lev hears of anything like that he takes it as being something symptomatic of the whole working population of America. Lev Yakovitch's ideas about working conditions in America are coloured or tainted with a hangover from the Jewish tales sent back from the sweat-shops of the lower East Side of New York.

But at that, he probably knows more about America than the average American knows about Russia—which is not saying much.

But to get back to Lev Yakovitch's reasons for happiness. He has the satisfaction of knowing that if he does have to submit to a great many physical hardships and go without many of the things that he wants, many of which are almost necessary, that he is suffering in company. There are a million other Communists in Soviet Russia who are in much the same boat. Their maximum salary is limited to 225 roubles a month (£22). Lev Yakovitch is getting 70 roubles a month—the average salary of a Russian workman. But Lev Yakovitch has the consolation of knowing that Maxim Litvinov can get only 225, and that while Maxim might have two

spacious rooms and a bath over in the Foreign Office, and roll about Moscow in a sumptuous Rolls Royce, that Litvinov has a wife and two children just as he has —and probably does not have ten roubles in his pocket that he can really call his own. Maxim Litvinov is considerably better off, as is Nicholas Vinogradsky, the head of the foreign section of the State Planning Department, but their positions are the goals to which Lev Yakovitch can aspire, for which he can really put in hard work (money, you see, isn't everything in this world), and Nicholas Vinogradsky wears a £4 suit— the same as Lev Yakovitch.

This is true. And so while Lev Yakovitch might envy Maxim Litvinov and Vinogradsky, and most certainly he envies the skilled workmen in his own printing mill (some of whom are making over £25 every month), his envy does not hurt. There is nothing bitter about it. If it's money he is after, then the hill ahead of him is not so very high to climb. By withdrawing from the Communist party and becoming a hotel porter he can easily double the salary of Maxim Litvinov. But if it's power he is after, a position of importance in his country, then he must abandon the mere quest of material things. And that is a good healthy race that many a man in London, Paris or New York would be glad to get into.

This isn't Communist propaganda; it merely states a few facts that ought to be obvious to any and everyone who has come in contact with Russian Communists. And there are millions of other Russian workmen who feel much the same way. They feel that as long as this is their country, and those at the top do not use their

power to lift themselves high above the mass socially, they can put up with almost any discomfort along this long road. The road is rough, but they are marching towards a promised land.

I chose the life of Lev Yakovitch, a Communist, because, as such, he is typical of the vanguard of Russian workmen today. I like his enthusiasm. I like to go with him to his factory-club and hear them discussing international economy; I like to eat with him in his co-operative stolovia, to have coffee and biscuits with him in his little ten by fourteen room up on the Volkanskaya (with his two children sleeping silently in their cots by our table); I like to walk with him over to his factory's skating-rink, their kino, their theatre; I like to have my photo taken by the factory-club's Photographic Society—and jolly bad photos they take—and with it all I constantly meet workers who are not Communists.

I entered one's room the other night—the factory fireman, getting £6 a month. Beside the lace-draped bed on which both he and his wife slept, and a perfect museum of pre-war furniture, there were three golden ikons in one corner—and a picture of Lenin in the other. The ikons showed that the fireman could not be a Communist, as all Communists are atheists. I pointed to them:

"What!" I exclaimed. "You have *both*?"

He grinned and bowed towards the ikons.

"I'm getting old," he said. "Not taking any chances."

He was playing Lenin and the Ikons, both ways across the board.

CHAPTER III

A RED WORKER'S HOME

LEV YAKOVITCH lives on one of the few hills in Moscow; and when I went up it one snowy night I saw what I at first thought to be a droshky rushing down at me without its horse. But when it passed me the dark mass broke—and eight children rolled off a sled.

Lev Yakovitch lives in one of those combined, collectivist apartments that are so common in Moscow. What they really mean is that several families have moved into one single apartment, each family occupying one room: kitchen, lavatory and bath-room being communal. No race any less good-natured than the Russians could put up with it.

My ring was answered by a pretty young woman with masses of curling chestnut hair. Behind her stood a Red soldier, who was also expecting a guest. They both showed their disappointment. But when I asked for Lev Yakovitch's room the girl pointed to the first one on the right, the Red soldier popped into his room, and the girl walked slowly back along the dingy corridor. Lev Yakovitch, who had heard my voice, now opened his door.

Most of the rooms in these congested apartments are so stuffed with furniture that you cannot cross the room

in a straight line in any one direction. The family has very often moved all its belongings, usually the contents of a former entire apartment, into their one cell. You see a sideboard with a china-shop of crockery and glass-ware; a dressing table with dozens of framed photographs, postcard albums, *objets d'art*, hair-brushes, combs (both male and female), bottles of scent, cigarette cases and ash trays. The hat rack on the wall by the door is swollen with coats, dresses, and the family's umbrellas and cameras; its top is a litter of feminine hats; its foot is a pile of shoes, boots and goloshes. There are beds or sofas in every corner.

But Lev Yakovitch's room was as bare as a barracks. Bare, that is, except for three beds and one table. There was a child in each of the little beds by the door: a boy three years old and a girl one and a half. The boy was being wrapped up in his little coat and muffler as I came in—he would go out and play for half an hour in the snowy yard. Some children had a snow-slide going there. The little girl sat up and blinked at me with her squirrel-like eyes.

" We haven't got much furniture," said Lev Yakovitch, apologising for the unstuffed state of his home. " We have only just started."

He explained that he himself came from the Chernigov district and did not have any Moscow furniture, and I refrained from telling him to thank God he had not.

He said that this whole apartment once belonged to a Jewish lawyer, a graduate of Oxford University, and that the beautiful girl who had let me in was his former wife. He had acquired another wife, moved out, and

was paying this one voluntary alimony by letting her keep the room. Rooms are precious in Moscow. Another man, in another room, had divorced his wife; but they were still occupying the same bed—as the wife could not find another place to go. He had divorced her because she was incompatible. But it was a very small apartment, with only four little rooms, none of which was occupied by more than four people.

Lev Yakovitch estimated the floor space of his room at 32 square metres. For this he was paying £1 4s. a month. This included heating and water and light; the water, for example, being 1s. 8d. per month per person. Heating was 200 per cent. of what he paid for the actual living space, which, in his case, was only 4s. a month. The rest was for electricity. It was very important, he explained, that rents should be figured this way because it made a great difference in the summertime. In the summer he and his wife and their two babies rented a datcha (bungalow) in the country outside of Moscow. They paid £5 there for their room for a whole summer. And they could keep on their room in Moscow by only paying for the floor space, or 4s. a month.

His wife was a thin girl, with that pallor and strained lines of the face that the mill stamps on all of them. But her blonde hair was cut in a very good Eton crop. She wore a white cotton shirt-waist, very stiffly ironed, and a short blue skirt. She was twenty-four and had been working in the mill since she was seventeen. Lev Yakovitch was twenty-eight. He was born in the Chernigov district, where he passed through a sort of grammar-grade law school, at fourteen having gone

into a metal works which had been put on a war basis. From 1919 to 1922 he had been in the Red army. After that he had returned to his village, where, in its speciality of handicraft, he made as much as £15 a month as a thread-waxer (whatever that is). But the Red army had shown him Moscow. He came back, got a job in this textile mill, where he met and married Valya; and now, although he is only making half as much as he would in his village, he will leave neither the mill nor Moscow.

"Moscow is so interesting," he told me, producing at the same time a photograph of a glider the factory aviation club had made, in which he had stayed off the ground seventeen minutes.

While we were talking the child came back. Valya took him out to the communal bathroom; then she undressed him, gave him his cup of milk and put him to bed. She took some of his clothes out to a communal cupboard in the hall, as they had neither bureau nor wardrobe of their own. The boy went to sleep while we were talking. Valya took the coffee-pot and went out to heat it in the kitchen over their primus.

I sat with my back to the double doors leading into the next room. Through them I could hear the conversation of its two male occupants: an engineer and an actor from the Balshoie theatre. Frequently I heard the word "kulturney"—culture. They were arguing about it.

"Tell me," I said to Lev Yakovitch; "what are you going to be?"

"Be?" The question puzzled him; he looked around at his wife. "why, I am a worker."

"But what are you studying in your night school?"

I had expected him to say that he was studying to be an engineer, or at least, an executive.

"Oh. I'm studying the history of the workers' movement in different countries."

He said that the seven-hour day had given him an extra hour a day in which to develop his culture. A ridiculous statement, perhaps—as it had no connection with money.

CHAPTER IV

MITKA'S KINGDOM

MITKA LVOVITCH is four years old, and four times a week, while his parents are working in their textile mill, he can spend his afternoons, from three to seven o'clock, in the Moscow Children's Library. He is taken there by his nurse, a peasant girl to whom Lev Yakovitch and Mitka's mother pay 30s. a month to look after himself and baby sister while they are helping the Soviet factories fight the capitalists. There are women and young girls in the Children's Library to watch over him—and tons of other kids. He has lots of friends there ; some of them are nine years old.

The library is in the former home of a very rich tea merchant—a bourgeois. It has thousands of the children's books and beautifully coloured pamphlets that Soviet Russia manufactures so enthusiastically for its coming generation. They are all docketed into subjects: history, geography, politics; so that on the eve of Lenin's Day, for instance, Mitka could be given an entire file of books and pamphlets, suitable to his age, telling him all about the great Lenin's life. On the playroom wall for the youngest children is a picture of Lenin as a curly-headed child—just like Mitka. After

his reading or study or lecture Mitka is supplied with paper and paints or crayons to draw.

"Give me the red one," cries Mitka.

Like all things that the Russians do for their children this library is excellent. If it is a trifle too pedagogic in the way all books are classified as "positive" or "negative," good or bad for children's temperaments, and in the way the women supervisors stand around with note-books jotting down why or why not a child laughs—noting his reactions—Mitka is not conscious of it. For Mitka, as a place to play in the cold winter, it simply cannot be beaten.

"I want to draw a horse," he says—"a green one."

"But horses are not green, Mitka darling."

"Mine is."

And as an implement of the Communists this library also cannot be beaten. If Mitka is going to learn about life, the Communists intend to see that he learns it from their angle. "Give me a child until he is seven," say the Jesuits, "and you can have him for the rest of his life." And in the Children's Library the Communists have got Mitka.

It is five in the afternoon, and one of the young Russian poets has come to read her own book to the children. Let us suppose that today we have Miss Barto, who has just done an excellent book called "Brothers." An exquisitely turned-out work with vivid illustrations; its back says that this first edition is 10,000 copies, at 1s. 3d. each. "Little brothers," says Comrade Barto, holding up her book, "I shall tell you a story about some little brothers of yours who look

very different from you and live in different parts of the world." She reads (excuse the translation):

" The little black brother has curled hair
Which looks like fur.
He is very, very black and his eyes are too;
He is stamping his feet, saying
Gilli—Milli—Ga . . ."

Comrade Barto holds up the book and shows a little nigger boy jumping up and down outside a Kaffir kraal. His mother and brothers are cooking some potatoes—supposedly. Miss Barto reads:

" The little yellow brother has narrow eyes;
His hair is stiff as little needles.
Tching—ling—tchen. . . ."

Mitka yawns. He has seen plenty of Chinese boys in Moscow—all the little knife-jugglers. But he has never seen a black baby. Miss Barto now holds the book showing a little brown baby lying under a palm. . . .

" The third little brother is very fair indeed
With his eyes looking like coal
And his body like chocolate. . . .
. . . Kive—Shva—Shva. . . ."

Mitka sits up. He is intrigued by some draft animals in the background—a cross between a water-bull and a yak. They are pulling a strange cart past a temple. . . . And now—

" The white-skinned brother has a sharp and merry voice;
His eyes are very cheerful
And his hair is very yellow,
He is jumping up and down, saying
Mama—mama—ma . . ."

The children all yell. They have recognised themselves. A little Russian boy, bare-legged, in a red shirt, pointing to his little village log cabin! The picture is complete, the affinity established: little Brown, Black, Yellow and White brothers. Brothers! And now the young lady-poet turns to the serious half of her book—this is what life is like for the poor little Black, Yellow and Brown brothers. See the little "nigger" boy inside his hut, his mother putting him to bed, singing:

"Father is not yet back.
He left the house with the dawn;
He carried his heavy burden
Until all his strength had gone.
Oh-la! . . .

"Grow up quickly, darling;
You are not alone in this world,
You have many brothers there, and
Where fathers obtained nothing,
Much will be had by their sons.
Oh-la! . . ."

Opposite is a full-page plate in vivid reds, yellows, blacks and blues of Papa and other negroes, their backs bent, loading bales into a ship—with a hard-jawed white overseer looking on. The action now becomes more dramatic; on the next picture a Chinese silk-mill is shown with a supercilious yellow-faced foreman watching a mother and daughter at work. Chants Miss Barto:

"Mother sings a song to her little son Iu-Tzing;
My hands hurt as I have been weaving silk
The whole day long. . . .
The boss paid me nothing for the work I did. . . .

" but
You are not alone in the world,
Your brothers are there;
You will be in fire and smoke
With them—and together with them
You shall vanquish . . .
Sleep, my son."

And so on. The Indian mother sings to her son—" Don't waken your father—he came back quite exhausted—tomorrow he will bend his back again over the swampy lands he is cultivating—which have killed so many men—the boss will never let him rest. . . ." (Full page plate of Indian papa working in paddy field, with scowling overseer standing by). And now. . . . Why, it might be Mitka's mother singing:

" The time is not far off
When you will become a strong worker who will
Take his place beside his father
Who fought for the mill. . . .

" . . . Don't forget your lit-tle brothers
There in foreign lands;
Perhaps you will be to-gether with them
In fire and smoke . . . (gasps from children)
And together with them you shall
VANQUISH !"

Opposite is the closing tableau of the saga: a full-page factory scene; papa and two sons stoking a Soviet steel mill, with a vignette in the upper left corner showing a silhouette of three armed workmen firing on either the Tzar's or White Cavalry from behind a house corner wall—this is the way they won their mill!

" Yaw!" yells Mitka, seizing his neighbour's paintbrush. " I want to draw a cannon."

But at that, it is no worse than the pre-war American grammar-school version of Bunker Hill—as supplied by the Irish politicians who counted nothing lost as long as they could wangle the school-board graft at municipal elections.

CHAPTER V

COMMUNAL KITCHENS

SOMEONE has called eating one of life's three great pleasures, and about the only one you don't get tired of before you die. Forty-day fasts, vegetarians, slimming and such-like are understandable fads or beliefs; but that an entire nation should become indifferent about its food is something quite startling—especially when that nation used to have the most glorious food in the world. Poor Russia!

The truth is that it was the old Russian bourgeoisie who knew how to eat. The peasants and working classes, reared in poverty, had never acquired the habit—to them white bread meant cake. And, probably because he has lived in almost serfdom as a peasant, the poorer class Slav is the most indifferent man in the world as to what he puts in his stomach. I noticed this first in the Balkans, where I saw Serbs, Bulgars and Czechs living on an uninspiring diet of feeble cornbread and weak wine. They had all the ingredients around them to make good pancakes: milk, eggs, butter galore—but they never thought of mixing these things together. It never occurred to them. I could never get over my astonishment (as I had been raised by negroes) at what a good negro mammy could have done in those parts. I have had corn bread in the tanbark regions of West Virginia that would make a Slav

stand on his head. And as for chicken . . . Well, I simply can't write about it, it makes me too homesick.

" What do you eat?" I asked Lev Yakovitch.

My question was prompted by several days' coasting about in the communal kitchens of the First Russian Textile Printing Mill's working quarters. Five or six people living in one room was not so bad—anyway, it was a sight I had become accustomed to—but eight or nine families cooking on the same stove—that took some swallowing!

These stoves, which used to belong solely to the single family inhabiting the apartment (each room of which now held a family of its own), were only heated twice a week. On these two days the entire population of the apartment—sometimes as many as forty people —cooked their week's food. It was a sort of field day of frying, baking and stewing. All of which was heated up thereafter, and between the two days, on the individual primus stoves. Each family had a table of its own in the kitchen, and on each of these sat a primus. And in all my wanderings I had found just one Russian who admitted that he could not eat warmed-up food. His family of eight, he confessed, cooked something fresh and hot on their primus every day. I asked him what it was.

" I don't know. Soup, potatoes, a cutlet. . . ."

A cutlet, I might say, is any form of hashed meat, or fish, or anything, padded out with flour. A dangerous thing to order in an unknown restaurant. In cutlet form I have eaten a horse, a sturgeon, a snow-grouse; and, in some cutlets, I am sure I have had all three together. I got the same reply from Lev Yakovitch.

" I don't know. Soup, potatoes, a cutlet. . . ."

Like most of the proletariat he was utterly casual about what he ate. Whatever it was it was evidently so tasteless that it left no memory. For breakfast, when he was working on the first shift, he got up at five and had tea and bread; when he is on the second shift, which begins at two in the afternoon—and he works alternate shifts every week—he sometimes adds to his breakfast something that is warmed up from the night before. No doubt a cutlet. At the mill he is one of the workers who is supposed to snatch his meal while still at the machine (in this way saving the 30 minutes allowed for himself), and here, of course, he would eat something cold—bread, with possibly a slice of meat. After two he goes down into the Moscow Association of Consumers' Co-operatives restaurant attached to the factory, and here he gets what is very often his main meal of the day.

This restaurant is a bare, stone-floored room, with white-washed walls, linoleum-covered tables and benches. You take your fork and knife from a box as you enter the door. At the far end is a long open counter looking into the communal kitchen, men and girls in white hauling food out of enormous pans and kettles. The room is full of men in shaggy fur coats, heavy boots, their hats on, often eating with their wives and families —shovelling it in. They buy a cutlet and a whacking big plate of gruel and mash it up with their fork. It's just food—something to stoke you, keep you going—don't look at it—just push it in. But at that the food is sound, palatable and healthy. And remarkably cheap. In this communal " hash-house," where the scarlet

banner on the wall reads "FOOD CO-OPERATION OPENS THE WAY TO A NEW LIFE," Lev Yakovitch, as a member of the factory, can get a dinner composed of two meat courses for 8½d., or one meat and one vegetable for 5d.

Tea with sugar (per glass)	1d.
Tea in pot	3d.
Bread Kvass, bottle	4d.
Boiled milk, glass	2d.
Sour milk, with sugar, glass	3½d.
Sweet cheese, piece	3½d.
Compote fruit, glass	2d.
White(?) bread, loaf	2d.

For those not working in the factory a two-meat course dinner can be had for 1s., and a one-meat one-vegetable for 7½d. The meat, be it known, usually appears à la cutlet.

The part that food plays in Lev's budget even at these cheap prices is quite large. Lev makes £7 a month. His wife makes the same. That makes £14 between them—out of which they pay 2 per cent. to the Trade Union (to say nothing of the periodic "voluntary" loans, municipal or State, one of which took either half or the whole of a month's salary from nearly every Moscow worker last year); £1 4s. a month for the rent of their room, £1 10s. to their nurse to look after their two children (for even in Soviet Russia workers often have servants—"Big fleas have little fleas," etc.), and the rest is left for food, clothes, books and amusements.

These factory meals are really cheaper than Lev's wife could cook at home; and that is one reason why so

many Russians eat nearly all their meals in these cheap co-operative restaurants. But it is estimated that the very cheapest that five mouths could be fed for one month in Moscow would be about 90 roubles, or £9. Just tote these items up (not including the voluntary loan), deduct from the £14 (the combined monthly income of Lev and his wife, to which is added £1 4s. by the mill, as they are not occupying one of its free rooms), and you will see that from the £15 4s., Lev, Valya and their two children have just about £3 4s. a month left for clothes, amusements, etc.

But they have no doctor's bills to pay. When Valya has a baby she gets two months off from work, both before and after the event. (I often wonder why Russian working girls don't have a baby every year!) And, every so often, their Trade Union gives them free tickets to the best theatres in Moscow.

They are close to the " line," without the danger of either falling or rising very far from it. And this is the life of the average employed Russian workman today.

CHAPTER VI

WHEN A WORKER SHOPS

WHILE the Mostorg, the old Muir and Merrilees, and now the Soviet Union's prize department store, is cluttered with terrible "new-art" wall embroideries, and you see imitation bronze busts of Lenin sandwiched in between trumpeting elephants, naked nymphs and metal houris—to say nothing of the atrocious, twelve-cup tea service, valued £6 8s.—the Moscow Associated Consumers' Co-operative store attached to the First Russian Textile Printing Mill confines itself to a more utilitarian line of goods. This store is in the Zamoskvoretzky "rayon," a mill district of Moscow; and, even though it does sell everything from salmon to socks, it caters primarily for the necessities of the workers.

The bread counter is the most popular. Three men stand behind this, with black astrakhan caps on and aprons. The most expensive bread of all are the almost-white "boulkys," 2d. each. And if you touch one of these to see if it is hot and soft, as I did, the man will reprimand you. "Don't touch that," he will say. "It is not right to touch bread that other people might eat, with your dirty fingers." He did not say that to me in fear that I would discover that the bread was stale—it was nice and fresh—nor because he was impressed with

his position and " new culture " (it is eleven years now since the Revolution!), he said it because it was a rule of the store. " Black bread," he said, " is 1d. a pound; grey is 2½d." He took his knife then to wait on a customer and carved out a crisp-crusted triangle from the grey loaf, which was two feet in diameter.

Peasants were buying bread, rolling it up in a dirty cloth, and stuffing it down inside their sheepskin coats —next to their stomachs! What, I thought, was the use of clean fingers? Strings of workpeople were coming in from the factory, and as practically every woman in Soviet Russia works there was an equality between both sexes in their shopping. In Russia, when a workman comes home, his " old woman " hasn't been getting his dinner—they get that together.

The meat counter was not doing a big business. It never does. But beefsteak was being sold for 10d. a lb., hamburg steak for 2s., good ham was 2s., bacon 1s. 2d. This was at the " good " counter, but at a rather ambiguous board there was a ham which sold for only 1s. 1d. a lb. First-class sturgeon sold for 2s. 6d. a lb., second grade for 1s. 3d., and very, very poor imitation Swiss cheese fetched the remarkable price of 2s. 6d. a lb. A 1 lb. tin of tomatoes was 8d.; carrots were 1½d. a lb.; tangerine oranges 4d. each—no bigger than walnuts—and a mediocre lemon cost 6d.

These, mark you, were for people whose average monthly salary could not have exceeded £6.

There was no question of these goods being bought cheaper elsewhere, because these co-operatives sell whatever they stock at the cheapest prices on the market. The greatest difference that exists between the

co-operatives is the question of supply. For instance, during the last months of 1928 and into the beginning of this year it was almost impossible to get a yard of cotton cloth in the Mostorg, Moscow's biggest department store. You could probably detect the reason for this in the unusually high export of cotton goods during the first quarter of the 1928–29 Soviet fiscal year—it was being used to bring in some foreign exchange. And you can see the need for such balancing of trade when you see that a cheap sweater, but nevertheless containing a certain amount of Australian wool, sells in the Moscow shops for £3 12s.

On the other hand, a fairly decent suit of clothes can often be had for £5. No one can understand that—except, perhaps, the gentlemen on the Peoples' Commissariat of Trade who rig the prices. What we lose on the swings we make up on the roundabouts. This is all quite legitimate and even praiseworthy, and as far as actual necessities are concerned the co-operative store prices are kept down to the lowest possible.

The worker earning £5 a month probably has to pay little or nothing for his room—his share of it, that is. The average rent paid by a citizen of Moscow in 1926, the last Census, was 5s. a month. But even so with beefsteak at 11d., ham at 1s. 10d., and even the poorest grade of Beluga fish selling at 1s. 4d., it can be seen that food prices are formidable. One understands the Russian's passion for bread.

Girls' pumps of a very poor grade sell for £1 and £1 12s.; crude men's shoes for £1; low shoes of fair cut and workmanship for £1 16s., and knee-high black Russian boots, the commonest footgear, sell for £1 8s.,

£1 12s. and £1 16s. " Sporty " black shoes with suède tops fetch two guineas.

Men's cotton socks cost from 3s. to 7s. a pair; women's imitation silk cost 11s. Such things are probably the most outrageously priced; they are quite transparent, very coarse, and wouldn't cost 2s. 6d. in London. Silk stockings are anti-social, I suppose, conflicting with socialist idealology—a pair of very poor real ones costs £1 4s.

When a knitted sweater costs £4, and a man's suit or overcoat can be bought for almost the same money, one hesitates to compare prices. They are as out of proportion as the usual cubist drawing. They don't seem to make sense—not to anyone except, possibly, their creator. They are " rigged " mercilessly now to make both ends meet: the Soviet finances and the peoples' needs.

Lev Yakovitch, an average Russian semi-skilled workman, earns about £7 a month. If his shoes cost him £1 4s., his socks 3s., his suit £4, his shirt 10s., cap 12s. 6d., and overcoat £6—which, as a matter of fact, is the way he is dressed—this one outfit, if Lev wears any underwear, must have cost him two months' salary.

And this, perhaps, explains why, whenever I see him (at home, in his club, or sitting before his machine in the mill), Lev Yakovitch is always wearing the same pair of trousers. They are black, with thin white stripes; and they were obviously designed for the lower half of a morning suit.

Lev, it seems, has a suit for every day in the week—and this is it.

CHAPTER VII

A WORKERS' STRONGHOLD

VLADIMER, to me, will always be a slovenly little plaster town on the top of a muddy hill, the plains below it patched with an early thaw, and one long street running from the low white walls of its uninspiring Kremlin to the high plastered bastions of its twelfth-century "Golden Gates." This street, now the Third International, is packed high with the winter snow, and covered for its full length with an unbroken layer of brown horse-dung. The snow is melting, running in gurgles to the pools which in most places flood the pavement with the inhabitants shovelling more snow off the roofs in the wet sunshine and digging channels to let it flow down the hill. A parade of the Red army was passing as we first came up this hill: a few officers on horseback, some trudging infantry, slopping along, trying to hold the skirts of their great-coats out of the slush, the boots of the man behind splattering the back of the soldier in front of him; a detachment of ski-ers, skis over shoulder; a straggling machine-gun detachment—the gun-stands mounted on sleds made of skis; one or two pieces of field artillery; more straggling troops—and then we were allowed to go to our hotel.

The "Hotel Progress" was so progressive that it even

refused to accept visitors. A visit to the Vladimer Soviet was necessary for me in order to persuade them to give me a room. Then, after the secretary of the Soviet had assured the manager that it was necessary to be polite to a foreigner, despite the fact that he might look strange, I was given a room with seven beds in it—each of which, trying them as I did one after another, I found densely populated with bedbugs.

I would not mention these bedbugs, nor even the primeval state of the Hotel Progress "conveniences," were it not for the fact that their universality is a most important commentary on Soviet idealology. In fact, many visitors to Soviet Russia, bitten and chewed and even afraid to sit down, have been unable to clear their judgment from their own personal discomfort. They attach, think the Communists, too much importance to such material things. On the other hand, what is civilisation? It was strange, I reflected, trying to wash and dry my hands and face at the communal tap—without letting my cake of soap touch the appalling sink—that after eleven years of absolute freedom the proletarian washing place behind me was infinitely more filthy than any cage in a zoo.

In this respect, with its strange contrasts of filth and scholarship, misery and idealism, Vladimer, once the capital of Russia, presented an amazing portrait of a Slav provincial town. Along the dung-coated Third International street was a theatre giving "Faust"; the twelfth-century Uppenski cathedral was directly across from it, the treasure-house of the famous Rublov frescoes, with the grinning skeleton of the first Grand Duke of Vladimir, Andrey Bogolubski, staring up from its

glass case. Beside it, looking down across the vast plains, stands the delightful little St. Dimitry, with Asiatic lions and horsemen galloping along the bas-relief of its panelled walls. Further down along the same street are two tiny museums with some of the finest silks, brocades and ikons in all the world. In one of these museums I found the director of the theatre buying the pearl and jewel-studded coverings of the ikons—so that his players might have real pearls for their head-dresses—and when I came out into the street I found a weeping peasant girl carrying a child's pink coffin under her arm.

Another funeral passed down the dung-covered street that morning. It was like a procession of the Fates. Two women, robed in black, came along with the white coffin-lid carried on their heads, then a woman holding a tiny wooden cross, then two priests, dressed in silvered robes; stopping, turning to swing censers of incense and chant "Halleluias" at the corpse of an old woman, carried in a white deal coffin. It was filled with paper flowers, borne on the shoulders of four weeping crones. The waxy face of the dead woman stared sightlessly to where crows, disturbed from the street, circled overhead in the wet wintry sky. . . . And as the coffin went along, loud-speakers attached to corner walls talked, lectured, and played classical music with their brassy blare.

At three o'clock, when the first mill-shift was let out, the dining-room of the Hotel Progress was packed with workers. And to amuse and instruct them another loud-speaker roared in our ears as we ate. Its harsh bark had something of the proletarian arrogance in it, for Vladi-

mer, be it known, is the capital of a province which contains 75 per cent. of the textile mills in all Russia. There was no mistaking the triumph in the tone of that radio, yelling about " culture " and " co-operation." There was no mistaking the brusque complacency of the workers that thronged that low-ceilinged room. They were intensely virile and self-satisfied. Shovelling down their food; husky feeders. There was a terrific " mass-consciousness " about them, something exceedingly difficult to put a name to—but it was there in the expression of their faces, in the way they ate with their hats on, the way the waiters served them smoking cigarettes, the way the waiter at the bread table swung his heavy knife to lop off great hunks of black bread, and another waiter—balancing five plates of soup—roared:

" Clear the way, citizens! Clear the way, citizens!"

The Red army band came in and played while we ate, took a collective table in the corner, swallowed hot soup and cabbage, and then filled the room with the blare of brass and booms of drums. Mass—and power. Workers. " Comrades!" shouts the radio. The jostle of bodies—a girl laughs hoarsely. Bang! wham! goes the bread-knife—into a slab four feet long. Dishes of hash and macaroni.

" Clear the way, citizens!"

And outside—the frost glistening like a death shroud on the painted frescoes of the churches; the pearled kerchief of the Virgin a head-dress for Vera, the soubrette; and the peasants slushing down the dirty street in their plaited birch-bark shoes.

That's Vladimer.

CHAPTER VIII

DEFENDERS OF LABOUR

THE FABKOM, the factory committee, of the First Russian Textile Printing Mill was in session. It was composed of thirteen members: eight men and five women. Four men and one woman were full-time members getting £13 10s. a month (over twice the average worker's wage) committee pay; the others were still employed as workers in the mill. All of them go up for election every year. They form a " cell " of the Textile Labour Union; and their chief duties in this mill were—(1) To defend the economic rights of the workers; (2) to enforce labouring laws; (3) to represent the workers in the " collective " bargain made for their wages each year.

Nine members, eight men and one woman, were the committee sitting on this day. They sat in the dark hall of one of the mill's tenements, around a scarlet-clothed table, under pictures of Lenin, Rykov, Stalin and Tomsky. One brilliant electric bulb hung over their heads. The women, men and babies of the tenement formed a circle around them.

" Comrades," said the President, a burly worker dressed in purple velvet blouse and black astrakhan hat, " we are here, sufficient to open our meeting. I——"

" 'Ullo! 'Ullo! 'Ullo!" barked a radio from over his

head. It was from the *Pioneer Pravda*, the Russian Boy Scouts' newspaper *Truth*. " 'Ullo! 'Ullo!" A band struck up on the radio and played the Call. " Tavarishi. 'Ullo! A separate country in Fascist Italy called the Vatican . . . 'Ullo! . . . A fortnight's campaign for increasing our investments—put your money into cash deposits instead of vodka. . . . 'Ullo! School children from Tver organised a Sport society to ski . . ."

The FABKOM and members of the tenement sat there immobile. They were not listening to the howls of the radio, but they did not show disrespect for it because it was an " invention "—a symbol of Russian progress. Here was a voice coming through the air, and music, to workers, some of whom were even in bed in their rooms. A mother feeding her child at the breast pointed to show it the loud-speaker. Another tenement dweller shoved through our group carrying a tin basin full of his night's food, which he had just cooked on the communal stove. An old peasant emerged from one room —like a bear—rubbed his circle of whiskers and hair, and sat down on one of the hall benches. The radio stopped and the woman member of the committee stood up.

" I shall talk for half an hour," she admitted, smiling through the useless spectacles on the end of her nose. " All right," said the members of the committee, and they produced pencils and paper, frowned officially, and began to make notes.

" A great work has been carried on since my last report ten months ago; the committee has sent delegates to the children's garden, to the crêche, to the dining-

room, to the dispensary, and the hospital named Semashko. Delegates have watched over the sanitary conditions in the mill; labouring clothes have been distributed to the workmen and workwomen—('Not to me,' cried a bystander. 'I——' He was told he would have his turn to talk later on)—the committee succeeded in arranging to have 22 workmen sent to health resorts; 4 delicate children were sent to the Crimea, 29 to sanatoriums, 42 to rest-houses, 26 to a tuberculosis hospital. The doctors made 6,799 calls; 594 spectacles were distributed; 20 places for mothers in the Volodsky mill crêche—our own full; 102,000 roubles were spent for ventilation—but one must confess that things were not done very well—('I'll say they weren't!' from another bystander)—and 150,000 roubles more are requested. . . . One must note the high number of people who have been ill during the last 10 months: 88 per cent. in the cotton printing, 88 per cent. in the dyeing, 81 per cent. in the drying department—such a great per cent. of sickness must be explained by the great number of inhabitants in one room and by the delicate health of a great number of the workers. . . ."

(In the tenement in which we were sitting there was an average of five or seven people in one room—and in the previous chapter I have shown the conditions of some of them.)

Comrade Morozkina, the woman speaker, proposed to end her report by reading eight solid pages of a labour inspector's report. She was prevailed upon not to, and the questions began:

"Morozkina, why don't we have enough tea jugs in our co-operation?"

" Morozkina, why don't we have more hot-water taps in our mill? Instead of going to the dining-room we should be able to have it in our mill. Besides that, we want tables and wardrobes for our coats. You promised that—but nothing's done yet."

" Morozkina, what measures have been taken to prevent accidents? Many people are sick because the door of our room won't close. We called a carpenter who scratched his head and didn't do anything because it was too cold outside, something like 35 below zero."

" I want to say," said a member of the FABKOM—" I want to say that our administration is useless. It had to supervise the work of the ventilation but never did it. Instead of watching over the interests of the working class they neglect them. Our engineers walk around the factory and give orders to clear away heaps of snow—but they never pay any attention to serious things—such as ventilators, for instance. This thing is inexcusable. What do we pay them for?"

" So many thousand roubles spent," sighed a woman —" just so many thousand lost. Isn't it a shame?"

Comrade Morozkina smiled benignly. She was a wonderful speaker. She knew it. She answered her questioners, always with her kind smile. She promised to do everything in her power to satisfy the demands of the workers—which were very important indeed. She then took advantage of a lull to read the eight typewritten pages of the labour inspector's report.

A young girl came out of the room at my side and stared at her dully. A young man came out and coughed. The shaggy old man got up and went into the room. Some children played among the forest of

booted feet. The girls on a bench down the hall giggled and scratched themselves. Doors opened and people came out carrying dishes to wash. People came back carrying bowls of soup. A child before me had a nervous trick of always rubbing its forefinger over its upper gums. Partly dressed girls edged through us on their way to the communal cloak-room. . . . And the FABKOM talked on. . . .

CHAPTER IX

"STAND IN LINE!"

YOU have not made the acquaintance of Soviet Russia until you have stood in a queue. But as you have to stand in a queue for nearly everything that you do here—including taking your lady friend to the "family" bath—you need not worry about that. The queue is not a Soviet invention. I saw a queue here in Moscow in 1917, just before the Revolution, that went twice round a block. Policemen were superintending it, preventing the lines from getting tangled. The people were waiting to buy footgear.

No, the queue is something much more deep-rooted than that. The queue is a significant example of Russian character. There will always be queues here in Russia because Russians just naturally stand in line. It's in their nature. In the first place they are patient, and in the second—they do not organise. They never do anything simply if they can possibly do it otherwise. For instance, the theatre box-offices are open from ten or eleven each morning until four in the afternoon. But do the Russians buy their tickets then? Yes, a few, probably Baltic Russians, with some taint of foreign blood in their veins. But what do the real Russians do? They wait—and then—suddenly they feel a desire to go to the theatre. Just about twenty minutes before the show starts.

They rush for the tram. There is a whole mob of people waiting for the tram. But they get aboard, they squeeze themselves in; and as in Russia the conductor stands by the door—and you must mount by the back platform and go out by the front—the back of the tram is a squeezed mass—really a mashed-up queue—of people trying to buy tickets from the conductor, who must nick each ticket opposite the mark of the station you got on at: people squeezing past the conductor, and other people trying to squeeze themselves out the front door. Those who have seats sit there, blowing their breath on the frosted window-panes to make holes through the quarter-inch casing of hoar-frost so that they can see what is going past them in the streets. And then—through the hole—they see their theatre approaching them.

They have fought their way out of the front door. They rush for the theatre. One of them stands in line to buy the tickets while the others go to check their hats, coats, and goloshes—which they are required to do by law. They stand there in line. Patiently. Although as the time for the show to start draws near they suddenly lose control of themselves and charge the cloak-room attendants. There is no such thing as coming in late to a theatre in Russia. When the curtains go up the doors close—nothing and nobody will get them open again until the *entr'acte*.

But then the Russian theatres are so excellent, so fresh and reviving, that it is worth this ordeal to get into them. And in this case, by opening their ticket-offices in the morning, the theatres have organised. They make their mistake in having too few ticket windows

and in the fact that Russian theatre tickets are printed in sections on long sheets of paper—and have to be cut off as you pay for them. Also, after the theatre, you have to queue up to get your clothes back again, and those who are in front and actually have their coats, hats, goloshes, and gloves, have to fight their way out again. At one theatre here in Moscow, in the Dome Soviet, I have stood in line thirty minutes—trying to recover my hat.

The bread, butter, milk and grocery queues you see in all Moscow and Leningrad streets have an economic reason, to be sure. Too little supply. But here again it is mostly a question of poor organising, wretched distribution. And when the people do get inside the store everything is made as difficult as possible for them. First they have to secure the attention of an attendant, inspect their proposed purchase and ask its price, then they have to go to the desk and buy a check for exactly that amount, then they have to queue up again to get back to the attendant who thereupon either has their package ready for them or makes them select the order all over again. This is done to ensure honesty—that a buyer does not get his package and run out of the shop. In this fashion the shop gets your money before you get your package.

The railways are the worst sinners, because they only start to sell tickets for a particular train a short space of time before it goes. The shortness of this selling period varies with the truculence and independence of the local authorities. At Saratov, on the lower Volga, I stood in line, waiting to buy a ferry ticket to take me across the river to the German "republic," with the

tiny steamer hooting, the gangway one-half pulled in, forty patient Russians behind me—and the man behind the wicket writing out ticket forms by hand. He was "filling something in"—an invariable curse accompanying all tickets for locomotion in Russia.

The strange part of it is that the people do get into the theatres, they do get their steamboats and their trains; sometimes—when there's enough to go round—they get their butter, bread, eggs, milk and supplies. They get them with a really remarkable courtesy on the part of all attendants and a beautiful resignation on their own.

A hole of any sort, a ticket-window, gate, archway, any orifice draws them with a fatal magnetism. And to watch them mob such places daily you would finally say that the Russians just naturally don't know how to get through a door. There are two great arches flanking the Iberian Virgin that lead into the Red Square. One of these is always empty, and through the other pours a solid stream of human beings. Like a ceaseless passage of ants. All day long. Pushing, jostling, shouldering each other, getting in each other's way. The other empty arch is only thirty feet off, but it never occurs to them to use it—not unless ten Russians did—and then there would be a stampede.

CHAPTER X

NEW WEDDINGS FOR OLD

IT takes less time to get married in Soviet Russia than it does to buy a pound of co-operative bread. And as to a pound of fresh butter !—why, you can get a divorce in half the time. Although, unlike all other things that you purchase in Russia, you do not have to stand in a queue for them.

The Saks Bureau of Kiev, for instance, is on the third floor of a district police station. It is a small room, about twenty feet square, cut in half by a board counter. On one side of this counter sit two clerks. On the other stands a perpetual line of about-to-be marrieds, divorce seekers, people registering births, and others registering deaths. A birth or death costs 4d., marriage is 4s., and divorce is 14s. 6d. A little more if you come to be divorced by yourself, as there is the cost of the postage for notifying the other divorcee of the fact that he or she has been divorced.

On the day that I sat behind the Saks counter in Kiev I saw a birth, marriage, divorce and death, all officially attested to and completed according to the regulations within less than one hour. The marriage pair complained because they had to wait while there was the settlement of some flaw in the divorce. But I clocked them from single state into man and wife in

17 minutes 32 seconds flat. Rather slow, I believe, for the Kiev course.

It wasn't exactly a flaw in the divorce proceedings—it was merely a peculiar coincidence. The girl, a nineteen-year-old cinema ticket-taker, had come to get a divorce by herself. Her husband, she said, was not in Kiev, and the clerk was filling out the form on that basis. He was just taking down the husband's address—so that he could write him the news—when that glowering young gentleman walked in. He had come in, as a matter of fact, to get a divorce himself. The delay in the proceedings was as to which one would pay for it. When they were asked what was the matter, they stated quite frankly that they had just lost their taste for each other.

They gave this information voluntarily, as under Soviet law a couple is not obliged to give any reason for wanting a divorce. A man can divorce his wife, or she him, five minutes after marriage. But if a man makes a habit of doing this, say, after one or two days of married life—he will find himself doing time in gaol under the charge of rape.

In this particular Kiev district they averaged from 200 to 250 marriages and from 40 to 50 divorces every month. The majority of the divorces was due to the discovery of venereal disease. And in such cases the authorities not only approve of divorce, but strongly advocate it. People living together are considered married and there is no social stigma whatever attached. The children of such a union are considered just as legitimate as those born in matrimony, and the father is just as bound to contribute to their support, whether

he continues living with the woman or not. Which brings to mind a famous Moscow case:

It was a hot summer day in the park. Ivan Vassilich was reading his paper on a bench. He looked up and saw that a girl with a small child was standing in front of him.

" Don't you remember me?" she said.

He racked his brains for a moment—and then he remembered.

" Why, of course," he said, smiling. " Didn't I have tea with you two years ago?"

The girl smiled and sat down. It was wonderful to have met again. She took down his name and address —and then she walked around to the Saks Bureau and registered him as the father of her child. Frantic at the charge, the young man rushed to his lawyer.

" Why, I've hardly set eyes on her!" he declared.

" But did you have tea with her two years ago?"

" Well—er—yes."

The lawyer shook his head sadly.

" In that case, I am afraid, you will have to pay."

There was nothing startling like that on this day in the Saks Bureau of Kiev, although a couple did come in who had been divorced four years before—to get married again. They grinned a little sheepishly at the policeman by the door. The man started to take off his cap, thought better of it, and lighted a cigarette instead. He stood there with it dangling between his lips as he answered the questions as to address and occupation, nodded when the clerk read out the bit wherein both parties to the marriage admit that they know the penalty for falsification about previous marriage—and

the only emotion he showed was when the clerk insisted that this should be regarded as a second marriage, instead of a renewal of the old one. A second marriage cost some half a crown more. Then he and his shawl-headed re-taken wife signed the book, gave the clerk three roubles, and walked out, the stub of the cigarette still dangling from the man's lips.

It was like watching people buy so many tons of coal!

* * * * *

A week later I was in a very different affair. We were driving home from the steppes behind Odessa. The air was full of the talk of hunger and disturbance, peasant outbreaks. We had just left a village where the people were quite " ugly "—and then, in a little village by another dead salt lagoon we came on peasants dancing. It was a wedding. They were dancing, the wedding guests, to an accordion in the bare earth yard of the bridegroom's mud-walled house. The bride was standing in the ring of peasants, in white wedding-veil and wreath of wax orange blossoms. The bridegroom and best-men all had sprigs of wax orange blossoms in their buttonholes. They insisted that we come into their house.

They sat us down at the wedding table, beside the whitewashed stove, on whose clay top was the bridal bed. The bride and bridegroom sat under two bright ikons, and gave us wine. He made a speech, our Russian driver made a speech; we drank them health and happiness. They cut the cake—a large loaf of brown bread—and they gave us cabbage and meat and baked apples. While we ate this ceremoniously, the accordion

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player whooped it up in the crowd of peasants packed behind us. The girls among them started singing, like a chorus of birds. The little whitewashed mud cabin was full of the thrill of life. The girl bride was so excited that, when asked it—she forgot her new name. The girls shrieked at her confusion. We left them still dancing in the yard in the sinking sun. They told us they were going to dance and sing all night.

Their civil registration had taken place at the Saks Bureau three days before, but their real wedding had been in the village church that morning. It is a matter of opinion, of course, but I know which wedding I'd like best.

CHAPTER XI

THE STATE-RUN HOTEL

I SHALL never forget the "Hotel London" in Odessa. No—never! It is one of the wonders of this world. It is one of the most imaginative places I have ever been in.

The day I arrived they told me, for instance, that my room would be four roubles. By the time I got to my room I was told that I would be charged another fifty kopecks for an extra bed. Once inside my bedroom door, the concierge told me that he had forgotten, and the price of the room was really five roubles, and I would have to pay for it every day before five o'clock—when the office closed—otherwise there would be an accumulative tax of 25 per cent.

Tacked on the wall of my room was a notice saying that the bedclothes were three roubles a week. When I rang for hot water to shave, the maid tried to charge me thirty kopecks. They charged thirty kopecks for filling my wife's hot-water bottle—although they didn't get it. I said I would die first. This marked an ebb in the price-tide, during which I successfully refused to pay the bedclothes tax of three roubles. Then the tide surged back and the waiter put on 15 per cent. for serving my morning tea. I said:

"You tell the proprietor he knows what he can do with that."

"But it isn't the Khazan," protested the shaven-headed varlet, "I put that on there myself."

"What for?"

"For walking upstairs."

"Well then, when you walk down again, you take it off."

Conversations like that go on all day. The hotel, you see, is run by the State. But a Nepman owns the restaurant. If hot water is brought in to you from the restaurant, it comes in a teapot, and is charged for at tea-tariff rate—7½d. It is just a try-on—the foreigner or Tavarish might be thoughtless enough to pay the bill without examining it.

They are very naive about it.

The hotel has all sorts of guests. There is a notice by the desk saying that all non-registered inmates must leave the premises by 2 a.m. This refers to the three ladies who sit in the restaurant all day—and most of the night. Since the introduction of the new Soviet marriage laws, their profession has become almost obsolete, although they still carry on.

The Russians eat luncheon any time between two and six o'clock. After that there is a gap, a hiatus, a pause, during which the dark wooden dining-room is almost as deserted as a morgue. The prices, since six o'clock, have more than doubled themselves. But that is not the reason for the silence. The Tavarish are recuperating. They begin to straggle back again about ten o'clock. The violinist walks in in his fur coat and golf cap. The pianist takes off her sweater. They go to it, playing with that abandon of modern Russian music in which the only thing that seems to count is speed and sharpness.

Saturday night is the great night because then the " London " hotel restaurant has Odessa's one and only cabaret. At least, they call it that. And then, about 2 a.m., this ancient city by the Black Sea reaches the zenith of its night life.

Odessa is much richer in queer, abnormal comrades than the cities inland like Kiev. You see faces and heads and costumes around you that appear to have no relation to each other. The men have more hair attached to different parts of their faces than they have on the tops of their heads. The women wear furs, or low necks or sweaters—and it makes no difference which. Some of them bring their babies, which the men balance on their palms in exaggerated moments of gaiety, while their mothers scream. But there is no universal gaiety. Each party is self-contained. Joy is not communal—not in Russia—although this is a " high moment," bolstered up with seeing the others do it. Do what? God knows. But then, the Communists say there is no God.

They sit and clutch their heads. Most of them look as lonely as the two carp in the goldfish tank. The Nepman proprietor, an old man with a face like a frog, walks up and down like a mourner. He needn't—he is selling 5d. worth of caviare for 5s. Hardly a dish is less than that—in a country where a Communist's monthly salary is limited by the laws of his Party to £18 a month. Although the Communists can be absolved from this Bacchanalia of Odessa, most of them are in bed—or still working.

You can tell that it is not the Communists, because good Communists do not drink hard liquor—not in

public—and most of these tables have little vodka-carafes on them. Beer is also greatly in demand. On one table stand eight empty bottles, before two arguing comrades. Other comrades in black rubadhkas sit in dark alcoves so discreetly hidden that the waiters can hardly see to serve them. Potted palms stand before the alcoves, beside the pink marble columns and green plaster walls. The electric bulbs—always dim in Russia—throw a dim light over it all. The violinist, just finished with a shot of vodka given to him by an admiring diner, plays rapidly, loudly and mechanically through "Madam Butterfly," "Rose Marie," and "She's My Baby."

It is two o'clock. The cabaret has begun. The men who have girls are dancing in and out among the tables. Life is on the crest of the wave.

Two men, who have been eyeing me steadily, come over and sit down at my table. They are Potash and Perlmutter, an Abe and Mawruss of Odessa—of which there are many. They are Nepmen, they tell me almost instantly. They also tell me that they run a soda-water factory.

"Life is fine," says one.

"It's rotten," says the other.

"Well, anyway—you gotta admit it's better for the Jews."

"Maybe"—to me—"please, you ain't eating any cake."

Why don't the Americans loan them money, they ask me. I reply it is because they haven't yet paid what they already owe us.

"That's right," said Abe.

" Is it?" retorted Mawruss. " You wait. This is the biggest country in the world—we ain't afraid of nobody."

But the reason why they came over to my table, the real reason, was to ask me did I know a feller that lived out on " Maplyvood " Avenue in Chicago. Funny, wasn't it, that I had never heard of him!

CHAPTER XII

HUNGER

THERE had been a drought. The crops had failed. The carts were coming in across the steppes to Odessa to buy bread. They were coming in along the hard-packed dirt trails beside the salt lagoons. Dirt roads, rutted, hard as iron, shiny from lack of rain. The carts were full of chickens, ducks, geese. The peasants, wrapped in fur coats and shawls against the shrill wind, sat on top of the crates. The horses' ribs stuck out. Scrawny foals trotted along beside their plodding mothers. Some of the carts had been four days on the way.

" Dear one!" cried a peasant when I asked her why she had come such a long distance, " we have come to buy bread."

Their village co-operative, she said, had not been able to supply them since September. She had twenty-four chickens in a crate and ten white geese in the straw-filled bottom of the cart. She expected to get a rouble 50 kopecks per pair for the chickens, and three roubles 50 for the geese—with good luck, about £3 15s. She had come eighty miles.

It was no use asking her why she didn't stay at home and eat her own chickens and ducks. She wanted bread. Bread was the only real food. If bread went

wrong—then the whole world went wrong. She cried when she unrolled a dirty cloth and showed me the bread she had been eating on the way—crumbling corn-bread. That wasn't bread, she sobbed, wiping her old eyes.

We drove on. The carts came towards us over the skyline like a nation on trek. A man with a cart full of cornstalks had come fifty miles—it would take him another day to get into Odessa. Rich peasants bumped along in carts full of poultry, sitting on their covered crates, glaring at us over their heavy beards and fur collars—as if we meant, somehow, to take their wealth away from them. We passed the skeleton of a dead horse, a dog still tearing a last piece of flesh from the red-streaked bones.

The steppe was like a seascape. A vast sea of black earth. There was nothing on it. The ultimate horizon was as flat as a line. Distance gave it mistiness, a sense of everlasting expanse. There was nothing to break the monotony. Heaps of dead brushwood rolled and bounded across the earth like fleeing wraiths, rolling before the flat wind for hundreds of miles. There was nothing to stop them. . . .

We came to a village. It lay beside a salt lagoon in a depression of the steppe. Its houses were built of clay and yellow shell-limestone. There was a crowd of peasants, a dark mass, crowded before the village co-operative store. They were all grumbling. When we asked the price of bread, they looked at us, raised their voices, and said that there was none. Their voices rose higher. They pressed round us; their hairy faces formed a staring ring.

There wasn't any bread! " Go inside and look!" they cried, pointing into the dark interior of the squalid co-operative—and they pointed accusingly. " How do they expect us to live?"

We went on, always passing the long line of wooden carts. Sometimes they came in batches, five, ten, fifteen carts from some distant village. Some came singly across the steppe. Some with one horse, some with pairs, some with troikas. They showed us the chaff they were feeding their horses, jeered, flung a handful recklessly in the air.

At the far end of the lagoon lay a large settlement of fifteen hundred souls. We saw the white blocks of its houses a long distance off. White blocks along the yellow clay of the lagoon topped with the bulk and jade-green towers of its Ukrainian church. The road-ruts deepened as we approached it, roads splaying in from the high level of the steppe. As we entered its great square we passed an ancient Turkish mosque.

It was Sunday—the day of the village bazaar. In a square that must have been fully a quarter-mile long stood a few peasant carts. They stood in a straggling line at the upper end, before the co-operative store. A mass of peasants surged around them. Peasants dressed in homespun and high leather boots, shaggy fur caps that came down almost over their eyes. Some of the carts were full of cabbages; one held a barrel of German colonists' wine. There was a red rubber tube sticking out of the bung-hole of the barrel, from which the owner filled cups and glasses. Peasants were tottering about it in the mob, and one, leaning against the wine-cart wheel, was being vilely sick.

"Bread?" they cried. "Ha-ha! Listen to him! Devil take you! Bread? Why—where is it? Who's got it? Who's eating it? Last year we got white bread for six kopecks a foont; this year black bread is fourteen kopecks—and we don't get that! Look at him!"

They pointed to a German-speaking Jew, standing apologetically behind his "stand" in the village bazaar. He had an open sack of chestnuts, a pan of apples, a few cakes of coloured soap, some sickly looking candy—and a large slab of grey bread. The bread was like an exhibit—it sat in glory on top of the stand—with everyone looking at it.

"Look at it!" demanded the infuriated peasants. "That isn't even white—and he wants twenty-three kopecks a foont" (6d. for 14½ ounces). They touched the sacred bread which was baked in clusters, like biscuits, each one supposed to be a foont. "Yes, and his foont isn't even a foont!"

The Jew came around, his red nose dripping in the cold wind, and explained that if life was miserable nowadays, it was because the Jews were persecuted. They weren't allowed to grow rich—as all good Jews should. He pointed to the dark door of the little co-operative at his back, said that if the others didn't like his prices they could buy in there.

"Pfoui!" said a peasant woman. "You ought to be ashamed. You know there isn't enough in there."

She had four bits of coloured cotton in her podgy hand. She was a fat creature. She was going to make a dress.

"But there isn't enough," we protested, comparing her bulk with the small piece of red cloth.

" That's all they would sell me. I'll have to use other bits to make it up." A patchwork quilt.

The peasants wouldn't believe there was any shortage of food and cloth in the cities. The worker, they knew, was getting his allowance of twenty-two ounces of bread a day—at co-operative prices. They were being cheated, the worker was being favoured. Shouts.

"Don't lie! We've all been drinking. Tell the American the truth! Da—yes! The last man in Russia is the peasant!"

CHAPTER XIII

THE HOUSE IN THE WOODS

ABOUT fifteen miles outside Kiev in the heart of a silent oak forest lies the old Feofany monastery—a Byzantine creation of turbaned domes, cupolas, and sharp spires like witches' hats. Coloured bright green, white and red—popping up out of the dark forest, like a folk-tale. Once it was the home of the Black monks. But they are dispossessed now—you can see them working like ordinary peasants in the wooded rolling fields, an angry look in their eyes, bearded men in skirts and strange bee-hive hats, greasy hair hanging down their bent backs. Never, almost, since the beginning of history have priests been treated like this; for not only have they been driven from their home, but their home is actually practising what they once preached—it is a refuge for homeless children.

One of these, Ivan Ivanovitch Goueff, came out to greet us. Out to the edge of their own immediate clump of dark woods to where our eighteen-year-old American motor-car was stuck in a field. Ivan Ivanovitch was President of the Children's Colony. He was sixteen years old. He came from the Chernigov district of the Ukraine. His parents had died, he had wandered from his village, lived as a Bez Prizorny for three months in the streets of Kiev, sleeping in ruined buildings, alleys

and asphalt ovens—until caught by the police. They had sent him out to Feofany, where, instead of running away to rejoin the adventurous life of Russia's " little savages," he had settled down, become a Pioneer—a Communist Boy Scout—and been elected President at the half-yearly elections.

He was a snub-nosed, grinning youth, with the results of a bad case of small-pox. His black, man's overcoat reached below his knees, his sleeves hung beyond his hands like a Chinaman's robe, but his manners were quite easy and cordial. He walked with us through the smooth-floored oak woods, took us into the colony's dormitory, showed us the girls' rooms—five and six white cots in each room, with postcards and family photos stuck upright on paper-covered tables, and lithos of Lenin and Rykov all over the walls (in one room there were six pictures of Lenin alone)—and then he took us through the workshops where children were being taught carpentry, elemental mechanics and shoemaking. The cobbler's school was a particularly pleasant spot, with an old cobbler sitting on his low stool at the end of a long bench, around which were his pupils. They were down in a clean cellar, industriously stitching and tapping away at big Russian boots. They were learning a trade that in three years would allow them to go out in the world again and get good work in the shoe-factories.

Their tales were pathetically similar. Parents dead. So many days, weeks, months—even years—wandering as homeless children. Some had been picked up after five days on the streets; some of the girls had come straight from their homes to the children's home in

Kiev—and there was one little urchin, twelve years old, who had wandered all over Russia as a Bez Prizorny. He had the marks of it yet—that queer, not-of-your-world look of those wretched deserted children, many of whom simply refuse to be reclaimed. When we asked him how he liked the colony he did not enthuse:

"Nitchevo," he grinned impishly. "It's better than the streets when it's raining."

Another boy, a hunchback, had wandered away from his home on the Volga during the famine of 1921. He had gone off with his elder brother. His brother had died in Briansk. He had been captured in Kiev.

"They got me there."

The children have a farm, horses, cattle, and when I asked one pretty girl of sixteen what she did, she replied—"Pigs." They have regular school hours, classes alternating during the summer-time—one in class, the other on the farm. They can stay there until they are eighteen years old, after which the Feofany management gets them a job—and washes its hands of them.

The usual "institution" atmosphere, the thing that Jack London dubbed "the iron heel of organised charity," was not present in Feofany. The children were allowed to govern themselves, at least, there was the semblance of that power. Just enough to let them think they really were doing it, although their curriculum was planned by a Feofany Soviet composed of sixteen teachers and two pupils: the President, Ivan Ivanovitch; the Secretary, Lydia Pavlovna—thirteen years old—and six committees of children with four or

five on each, controlling and inspecting such things as work, sanitation, household, classes and club.

The president of the sanitation committee was a beautiful pansy-eyed Odessa girl, rejoicing in the name of Tamara Alexandrovna Visheny.

As I walked about with these children I remembered a conversation with Jim Larkin, in Dublin. That fighting leader of the Irish dockers told me that the Soviet Russia was Heaven.

"Look at 'em!" he roared, pointing out of the Workers' Union in Marlborough Street at Dublin's slum children. They were standing in line with their pinched mothers waiting in a queue to get bread a farthing cheaper per loaf than in ordinary stores. "By God! You'll not see that in Russia!"

Well, I did. I've seen queues in Moscow that went half-way down a block. But there was a difference. In Russia mothers stand in line and children go hungry because there isn't always enough bread to go around. But what Jim Larkin was talking about was another thing. There was plenty of bread in the country—only the children didn't get it given to them, as part of the State programme.

I don't believe that if there was enough bread to go round a single child would ever go hungry in Russia. It's against the whole idea of the Soviet State. But the Soviet State has other ideas which are not quite so fortunate—and one of them is the mental food with which it feeds its children.

In order to encourage the Feofany children to be first-rate Communists and eternal wagers of class war, one room of their club was lined with posters depicting

Englishmen chopping off negroes' heads, drinking whiskey and sodas while others were tortured; Americans and British executing Chinese; and Germans, Poles, Bulgars, Roumanians, and White Russians holding assorted pogroms on their various working classes and minorities. The violent lithograph of the French burning the Riffs at the stake in Morocco might have been amusing, were it not that this entire chamber of horrors, full of "bad examples" such as black-jacks, knuckle-dusters and knives taken from juvenile criminals, was all part of the Soviet programme to inculcate and inflame hate. It was a room in which no child could be expected to ask very much more than their usual eager question:

"When will the revolution start in America?"

And it made one feel that, while the Soviet certainly put bread into the children's stomachs, it put poison into their brains.

CHAPTER XIV

A PROLETARIAN TRIAL

"BUT we both loved each other," said the wife.

"Then why did he stab you?" asked the judge —a question which everyone in the court thought very sensible, and which the wife found hard to answer. The judge put it simply, speaking as one woman to another, without any legal verbiage, and with a sincere desire to get at the truth which, compared to the complexities of conventional jurisprudence, seemed both refreshing and admirable.

The scene was the long, putty-coloured plaster hall of the Kiev Tribunal. The defendant was a policeman, twenty-six years old, who had stabbed his wife because he said she had deceived him with another man. The accuser was the State, trying the policeman to ascertain whether or not his attempt at murder was premeditated. The chief witness was the man's wife, a pretty plump blonde, nineteen years old. She had married the policeman when she was fifteen and had a baby two years old.

The judge was a woman. She was twenty-nine years old. Formerly she had been a tailoress. She had joined the Communist party in 1917, studied five years at law —working three days each week meanwhile as a tailoress—and now she was a full judge. Six times within the last three years she had given the death sentence,

although five of these verdicts had been revoked by a higher court. She was elected to her position in the Kiev court by the proletariat. In this particular case she had the power to give a sentence of from one day to eight years.

There was no jury.

But there were two auxiliary judges, elected by the working people to sit with the diplomaed judge and give verdict. They both worked in a print shop. One was a young Communist about twenty-two years old. The other was a serious young man of about thirty. They would hear and vote on this case—the best two out of three deciding it—and then they would return to the print shop. The young Communist wore an ordinary business suit, with grey flannel shirt and green knitted necktie. The lady judge had bobbed hair, and wore an open silk shirtwaist under her fur-trimmed blue coat. The board-floored court was high and cold.

The prisoner, the policeman, sat in the dock at the court's left, wrapped in a heavy black overcoat. His lawyer, given him by the State, directly below him. There was a wooden box opposite, for the " procureur "—a Soviet cross between prosecuting attorney and official observer—but this was not filled today as the case was not considered important. The judge fulfilled the double function of judge and State prosecutor.

The courtroom was full of peasants, workers from the shoe factory in which the girl worked, and relations. Some of them were dressed in ragged sheepskin coats. All of them were quiet, respectful and serious. The girl's mother, rather a flashy-looking woman with plaid dress and orange toque, sat in

the front row holding the two-year-old baby in her lap.

But there was another spectator in the court—a bandit. He sat right behind the policeman on trial, awaiting his turn to be tried next. He was to go on at about three o'clock. This was only eleven, and he was cold—he wrapped his thick jacket around him. He was a gloomy, pale, but good-looking young peasant of about twenty, and he grinned cynically as the policeman told how he had been made a cuckold. He glanced with a faint sneer at the three armed soldiers guarding the door at his left. All this bother about a botched stabbing, when really the only thing that mattered in the whole world was—What was going to happen to him? He frowned. . . . This was a mere case between husband and wife. But with a bandit—ah, the crime could be turned into an offence against the State—and for that the penalty was death.

The policeman told his story. Told it sullenly, without looking at anyone in the court; he had found out that his wife had been playing about with another man, yes, and—well—he tried to kill her. He couldn't remember whether he had thought about it for a long time or not. That was all.

The wife was called. She came in fresh and pink through the corridor door. She wore high black boots, cotton stockings, and a plain blue fur-trimmed coat exactly like the judge's. She had a green woollen scarf wrapped round her blonde hair and chin. She smiled at the judge. The judge did not smile back. She told the girl to get on with the story. "Liar!" blurted out the husband. The judge looked at him reprovingly and

the prisoner relapsed in gloom, his hand rubbing the bristles of his shaven bullet head. The girl-wife said that once he had tried to cut her throat with a razor.

" But I thought you had said he always loved you?" said the judge.

" I know—I——" the girl faltered.

" When did he try to kill you with a razor?"

" I—I can't remember."

The judge leaned forward ever so slightly and narrowed her eyes—a purely feminine expression.

" You mean to say you can't remember when he tried to cut your throat?"

Then those of us sitting beside the girl saw her do a most peculiar thing. She slumped in the witness-box and the weight seemed to go off her legs, as if they were weak. Her voice, which had been bold and rather gossipy, became faltering and hoarse. She turned, almost appealingly, to the unseeing stare of her husband—as if asking him to back her up.

" What kind of a knife did he stab you with?" asked the judge.

" I don't know. When he sat down to dinner he had a knife in his pocket. I didn't know whether it was for the dinner—or for me."

" I see."

The judge's tone said plainer than her words that she didn't see. She was giving the girl the lie, and everyone in the courtroom knew it—including the girl. She began to flounder in her testimony. She contradicted herself. And here, in the courts of Europe and America, is where the lawyers would have come in. They would have found some technicality, some complexity—on

which to divert the case. But not so in this primitive procedure of the Soviet. The court had the girl on the run; she was lying—and they knew it. The girl knew it too; she felt the onus of truth, the eyes of all the peasants and workers boring into her back.

" He loved me!" she cried. " You ask him! After he had stabbed me he held me in his arms, and he said: ' Thank God, the knife didn't find your heart!' "

The judge smiled then and stood up. She gave the court a recess. And her slow smile as she looked at the girl-wife told plainer than words which way the verdict would go, for it said: " You *have* no heart."

CHAPTER XV

THE SINS OF THE MOTHERS

IN Soviet Russia a mother can take her baby to prison with her if she wants to. She can keep it there until it is four years old, after which the State will take charge of it, place it in some children's home, and return it to the mother after she has done her stretch. And—as both prison and crèche are usually much superior to the baby's own squalid home—a Russian baby in prison has just about as much fun as Russian babies outside.

Immediately inside the door of the yellow-brick women's prison in Kiev is a crèche. A clean, well-swept room full of wooden cribs, each with a baby inside wrapped in swaddling clothes, like a hot-water bottle, with only its head sticking out. There were sixteen of these cots in the very young babies' room. In one was a new-born baby. It had just been brought down from its mother, who was feeding it herself, up in a prison room. She was doing four years because she threw sulphuric acid at her husband's eyes—so that he might never see another woman.

In the other room of the crèche were babies from one year to four. They were all clean, fat and healthy. And at the end of one wooden cot I read, "Valia Inztberg." Valia was three years old, the daughter of

an unsuccessful abortionist who was doing a stretch of four years—although, as her mother told me herself, it was a put-up job between her husband and his lady friend to frame her. Get her out of the way. She wept a little as she told me this, because Valia would have to go out next year—being three years old now—and her mother had two years still to serve.

Once a week, in the Kiev prison, the mothers are allowed to have their babies to play with for two hours. At other times they are taken care of by the three trained nurses of the crèche, assisted by "trusty" women prisoners themselves. They are taken out in the prison garden and aired daily. And, so far as his knowledge of his whereabouts was concerned, the acid-thrower's little son, just born in the Kiev prison, might have been lying in a mansion on Fifth Avenue. Valia, the abortionist's daughter, was, perhaps, beginning to wonder. She lay there rolled up like a cocoon in her clean blankets, and eyed me questioningly with her round innocent blue eyes. Her head was shaved. She might have been a little boy. She was almost a neutral thing in this house of punishment, unaffected and unaffecting it, quite unaware of the irony of the fact that the laughing "trusty," tucking her in, was also an abortionist. A joking but sinister woman. And it occurred to me as Valia and I stared at one another that she would get a much better start in life from this prison than she possibly could from the environment her mother had conceived her in.

In Soviet Russia everything is done to make a prison as much a home as possible. The women's rooms were not cells. The doors were not barred, and they walked

about the corridors as they wanted. They lived collectively, ten and twelve in a room, like dormitories—or the servants' quarters of some big hotel. If I had been told that I was in a woman workers' club, I would not have been astonished. The women were dressed in ordinary clothes; they had flowers and photographs on the tables by their beds. They sat on their beds dressed as if to go out, because the prison was cold—although some of them were not going to leave there for ten years.

But still, there was something very sinister, a cloud of evil, in the air. It was like the strange odour of disinfectant used to clean the stone floors. And perhaps it came from the very fact that these people had committed horrible crimes, and were not receiving due punishment—at least, to our Western eyes.

The maximum sentence under the Soviet law for a crime, other than one against the State, is ten years. But there is a most startling discrepancy between the different sentences. Such a strange evaluation of crime. The Soviets seem to see no difference between a mutilation, murder, slow poisoning, minor theft, and the making of illicit vodka.

In the first room, for instance, was a murderess who had killed the child of her husband's mistress. She had taken the woman into her home, persuading her to have the baby born in her house, in order to get control of the child. An evil, scheming, beady-eyed hag, she was only doing four years. Another woman, an acid-thrower, who had blinded her husband, was serving three. She was a shrivelled, bitter-faced shrew. The third was a full-bosomed ripe young blonde,

wicked perhaps, despite her wide blue eyes. She was in for the same stretch as the acid-thrower—three years—for having been caught stealing a second time. This girl was a waitress who had stolen some coats from the cloak-room and sold them. The sentence was heavy because the Russians come down heavily for a second offence—a habit.

In an upstairs room was a murderess, a thief, two madams from different brothels, another acid-thrower, an abortionist, a herb-doctress—and a girl bandit. The thief was a young girl who could not have been more than seventeen. The worst madam was a scarlet-faced, leering creature well past the fifty line. The Russian Communist with me shouted with glee when he saw her sitting on her bed.

" I'm glad to see her here! She lived in the same building as mine. She had apartment No. 1, and I had No. 3. There was a row going on in her place all the time. Police coming in at all hours of the night." He turned to her. " How long have *you* got to sit here?"

" Five years."

The woman grinned at him, showing a mouthful of bad teeth. She was wearing a grey sweater over a bulging blouse, and her grey head was wrapped in a magenta scarf. She pointed her sewing-needle at the other weeping madam.

" Look at her! She's got a poor heart. Listen to the way she is bellowing—and all she got was four months."

The other woman, weeping melodramatically, swore that she would never go inside a brothel again—much less keep one. And one of the most amazing episodes of the whole afternoon was the effect of these tears,

which persuaded the visiting procureur who was with me to release her on the spot!

The girl bandit eyed all this with almost an aristocratic disdain. She was a slender young woman of twenty, with brown bobbed hair and a brilliant bandana tied around her head. In company with some young men, whose names she would not divulge, she had held up a peasant village at the point of a revolver. A very serious crime—six years!

The abortionist had made a miscue. She had no licence—and the girl had died. Eight months.

The young girl thief wrapped a woollen shawl about her body and sank back on her bed against the wall. She hadn't stolen the goods, she said—she merely sold them for the girl who had. She was going to be in prison for a year, and she asked the woman advocate with me to write a letter for her to her home. She wanted her coat—it was so cold in these stone walls—and she could not write.

The murderess was a blonde of about thirty. Her yellow hair was brushed straight back from a pale freckled forehead. Her eyes were blue and wide, but they had no expression. You couldn't see anything in their depths—because they had no depths—they were like a china doll's. She was serving ten years for helping her husband to kill a man. She had been in here two. I asked her what prison her husband was in.

"Oh, he's out," she smiled.

"Out? And you're serving ten?"

She smiled at me icily, swinging one plump, brown-stockinged leg over the other. She smiled at the prison warder when he said:

" She is bad. In for robbery once before."

She turned then to the table beside her bed and began to roll a cigarette. On the table was the picture of a peasant wedding group: girls in stiff white frocks, and booted men in stiff black. She was standing beside her husband holding a bouquet of spring flowers in her hands.

There was such a feeling of boredom throughout this prison that only the herb-doctress seemed to feel even sorry for herself. She turned her back when we came to her bed. She turned her face to the wall. She turned once and looked at us, her eyes watery and red. We did not ask her about her strange medicines that she had been caught giving to men. She was only doing four months. And a quack love-doctor was a mere nonentity among the distinguished company we were in.

Nor did we converse with the acid-thrower, who, throwing sulphuric acid at her husband's eyes, had missed—and blinded another man. She was the mother of the new-born baby in the Kiev prison crèche.

CHAPTER XVI

GOOD FOR EVIL

IN one of the barrack-like rooms of the Kiev No. 1 prison there were three convicts. One was a murderer, serving four years. Another was a horse-thief, serving eight. And the third was an embezzler, doing ten. The sentences seemed the wrong way round, but—from the Soviet point of view—they were ethically correct. The murderer, in a moment of passion, had stabbed his brother-in-law because he had been maltreating his wife, the murderer's sister. He had come to her rescue; there was something almost noble in such a deed. The horse-thief was a professional who made his living robbing the peasants. He made a habit of it. He was dangerous to the neighbourhood. And the embezzler had stolen 32,000 roubles of the State funds. His was the worst crime of all—from the Soviet point of view—because he was an enemy in the merciless war they were waging against official corruption.

You have to know the old Russia to understand this last case, the old Government of the Tzars, where practically every official had his price, and where old Mr. Graft was a partner to every single contract. In the years 1919–21, the Soviets shot corrupt officials out of hand. Now they give them the limit every time

they get a chance. And that is why you can spend two months in Russia nowadays without ever once hearing the word "Graft," where before it was about the only thing you discussed after you crossed the frontier.

Ten years is the limit under Soviet law, and, although the man who stole 32,000 roubles had been given five years in Siberia on top of that, and a further six years when he would be deprived of all rights of citizenship—really valuable rights such as the privilege of belonging to a Trade Union—he was really lucky. If he had been a Communist, he would have been shot. Communists are punished doubly heavily for any crime because they are supposed to set an example—being the vanguard of the proletariat.

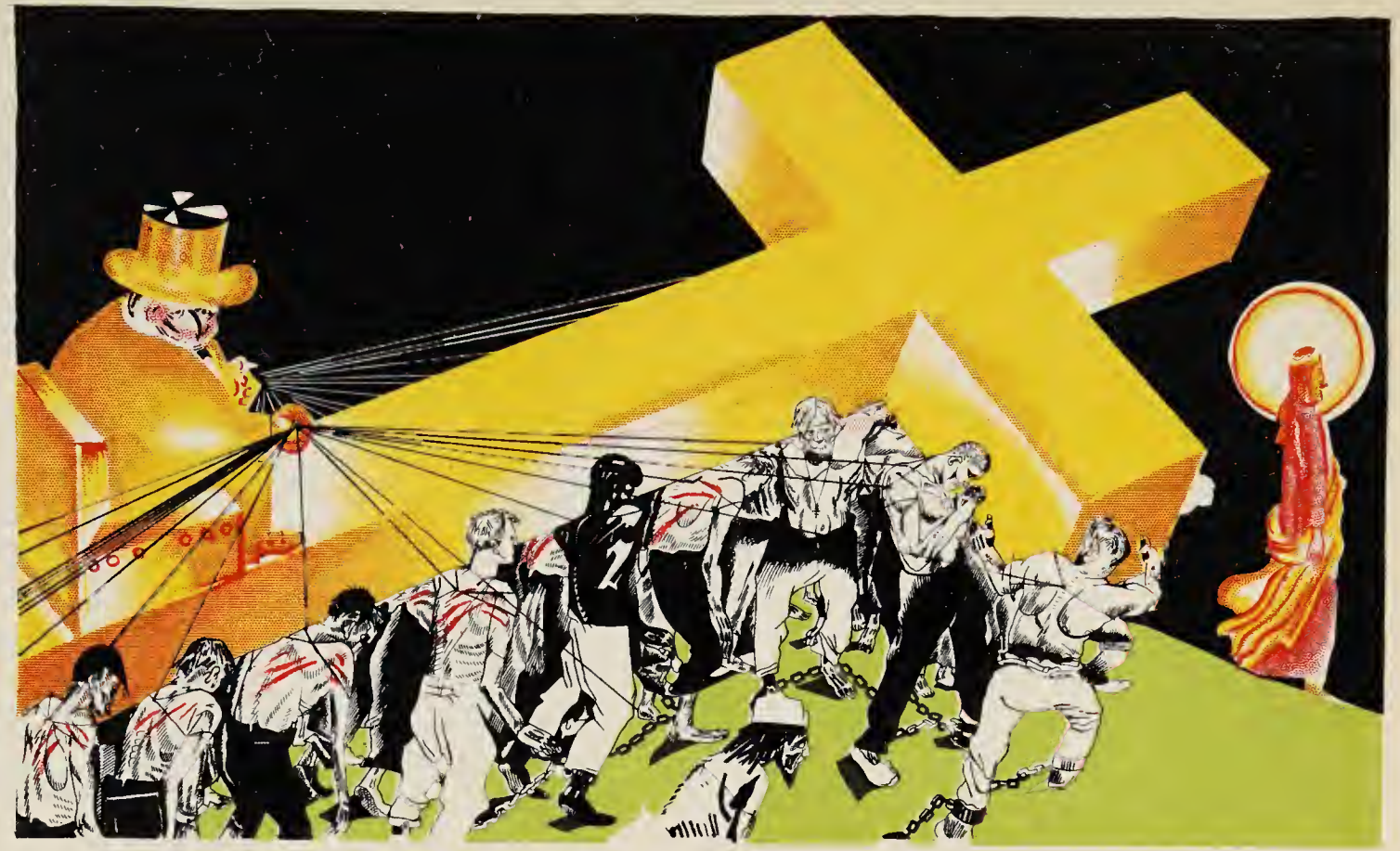
Ten years is not a wide range within which to allocate punishment for the world's scale of crime. To Western minds, especially those who have never been in prison themselves, ten years seems all too short. But the Russians work on the Marxist idea that no criminal requires punishment, but is an unfortunate to be educated and assisted and placed in a different environment. No Russian will ever believe that a man commits a crime because of anything in himself— it must have been the circumstances and surroundings. If they were shown a better way of living they would not continue a life of crime. Life in prison, therefore, should be made more comfortable than in their own homes, and in that way crime will be eradicated! And that, perhaps, explains the happy-go-lucky life of the 600 convicts in Kiev No. 1 prison—over 450 of whom were murderers.

"And what did you do?" said the warder, slapping one of them on the back.

"Ah! I killed a peasant."

It seemed to be the universal explanation. The average murderer seemed to be serving four years, except when robbing under arms—and then he usually got ten. That is the limit for murder in the Soviet Union, except —for murder against the State. If a rich peasant—for instance, a Kulak—murders a local newspaper correspondent (all newspapers are run by the State), the Kulak will get death. And, as far as that goes, when the circumstances seem to warrant it, any crime from theft to rape can be—and has been—construed as against the State. In the Kiev No. 1 prison, a rough survey seemed to average their sentences at six years, which, as a prisoner gets one day rebate off his sentence for every two days' work, means that the average murderer was serving four years.

The prison itself is a large stone and brick structure like a textile mill. The prisoners live collectively, ten and twenty in a room, like soldiers in barracks. In fact, their rooms full of brown-blanketed cots (some had padded quilts), with many prisoners—such as deserters from the Red army—walking about in old uniforms, made one rub one's eyes to believe this really was in a prison and not with some regiment. The men wore any kind of clothing that they cared to. There were some queer costumes—fur coats, soldiers' helmets, sailors' hats. They were working in an iron foundry making plates, forging, cutting, pouring molten lead into moulds; working in dark, furnace-lit arches in a lower passage. They always smiled when we asked them what they had done, as if half proud of it. Some said they hadn't done anything at all, and they couldn't



think why they were there. And one, admitting that he had not done anything, said that that was his crime—being a " parasite," a drone in his village—and he was now doing three years.

In Kiev No. 1 a prisoner works an eight-hour day, is paid one-third of the outside rate for his work, gets one day rebate off his sentence for every two worked—and his family is partially supported by the State.

They had a theatre, with raised platform, curtains, painted backdrop, and rows of well-polished audience benches, where they could act their own plays; a newspaper, *The Voice of the Prison* (with excellent cartoons), and a club. Their diversions were mental rather than physical, as they did not seem to play any outdoor games. And the prison hospital left nothing to be desired.

But it was a gruesome spot for all its cleanliness and sanitation. The prisoners were separated into groups: eye, ear and intestinal cases, venereal diseases, and insane. In one such room was a pyromaniac, a fidgety creature, always pawing his scraggy beard and quivering lips. He was drawing designs, an art he had just begun to learn, and his *magnum opus* was a scroll with his three children's names—Pietor, Marie and Alexi. Sitting on the next cot was a staring, cross-eyed monstrosity with a head twice too big for his body; he had burned down his cabin with his peasant father inside it. Another was a red-bearded hooligan, who had killed a man in the street—he didn't know why. And then there was the room of the " furious mads "—indescribable—staring at us after we left them through the peephole of their door. They were under observation, and

yet I believe I will never forget the stare of that mad single eye through the three-inch peep-hole in their door. The Russians are trying to solve their problem too.

The prison was like a laboratory where the State was experimenting upon itself. The dangerous experiment of putting the Marxian theory—returning good for evil, —to the test.

CHAPTER XVII

PRISONERS ON PAROLE

THE Russians are theorists *par excellence*, the great difference between them and other theorists being that they do put their theories to the test. And surely one of the weirdest examples of these adventurous experiments must be the Rubieshowska Penal Colony outside of Kiev, where a well-behaved murderer can get two months' vacation every year.

We got there just at sundown on the day when they were having their fortnightly bath. Most of the men prisoners were collected in one of their downstairs sleeping rooms, fresh and rosy, cheerful after the hour's sweat in hot steam. They were standing around their beds—each of which had a clean fortnightly sheet—a great deal like a football team dressing after a game. It was Saturday night, and tomorrow 30 per cent. of them would be allowed to spend the day in town.

In fact, the only penalty of this penal colony seemed to be that they were forced to stay there and work on the prison farm for a number of years. They dressed just as they wanted to; they had their own horses and cattle to care for; they went into town to dispose of their produce. If you can imagine a market garden outside Birmingham, run entirely by prisoners dressed in ordinary clothes—with two months' holiday a year

—you can imagine the shock we got in the stable, when being shown some fine draft-mares, to learn that our guide was a murderer serving five years.

Their home was an old-fashioned stone country mansion at the end of a long oak-lined drive off the main road. There was a grove of horse-chestnuts around the farm, a truly rural effect, with the barns and ploughed fields going off to a deep wood behind. Each room of the farmhouse was full of iron beds. None of the windows was barred. The front gates were locked, but this was more to keep people out than to prevent escape. That was almost too easy, because this was an honour colony in every sense of the word. Averaging over the six years since its inception some fifteen men had tried to escape every year—and out of that lot all but fifteen of these had returned of their own free will.

They ranged from petty army deserters to an aristocratic bank embezzler, whose black leather coat was trimmed with grey astrakhan collar and cuffs. There was a Nepman who had falsified his store's cash returns, a true relic of Russia's surviving bourgeoisie. He also was dressed in grey astrakhan, and was in for four years. A splendid-looking person with fiery red goatee turned out to have been the president of a village Soviet, who had stolen the funds, doing eighteen months. They gave us these details without shame: murderers telling whom they had killed, thieves saying how they had stolen wine, the banker merely smiling a little wryly at himself as he murmured that he was doing quite a long stretch of five years.

When we expressed our surprise at the high percentage of murderers in the prisons—about 80 per cent.—

one of them gave a philosophical shrug, but another one, as if to apologise for such callousness, said with a smile, " It is almost always love."

Love! The Rubieshowska Penal Colony has plenty of even that. In the summer there are usually some 350 men on the farm and about 40 women. They are not chaperoned. If the women wish to have love affairs with the men prisoners that is their own affair. They can meet in the fields. The authorities do not encourage this, they do not believe in promiscuity; and they insist that if such an affair does occur the couple remain faithful to each other. Married men, however, are permitted to have their wives visit them a certain number of times a month for connubial relations. Women the same. If a man has no wife he can present the prison authorities with a list of his lady friends who feel so disposed. They will go over this, send for the young lady who meets with their approval—and turn their backs. The authorities even encourage this; they say it does away with one of the worst evils of the American and English old-fashioned penal systems. The solitary warder in charge is the prisoners' cupid . . .

There are several hundred acres on the farm.

Without a doubt it is the most delightful prison I have ever been in. The prisoners have an excellent theatre with lithos of Lenin and Rykov and noted revolutionaries on the walls. There is a very sweet picture of Lenin as a child with long golden curls. Their radio station tunes in with London, Paris, Berlin and Stamboul. They tried to get the Turks for me the night I was there.

The women prisoners were also having their fort-

nightly bath—so I did not get an opportunity to see much of them. But they let my wife go into their steaming dark bath-house, where she talked with illicit vodka-makers, thieves, and one soulless creature who had abandoned a friend's child in Kiev. Some of them were in petticoats, washing their other clothes, but most of them were dressed like Eve. With one or two exceptions they were not very attractive, and this perhaps explained the success of one of the prison's most daring experiments. This was when they placed several of the male and female prisoners in circumstances where love-making was practically inevitable—and the men refused. A true proof, said the prison authorities, of improved " tone " among the men.

Perhaps; but it was a jolly little penal colony for all that, and when Cupid—when the warder let us out of the driveway gates, I felt certain he would have much more use for a bow and arrow than for his regulation automatic.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE OLD MAN OF THE PASTRY SHOP

IT was a rainy day in Kharkov, the capital of the Ukraine. Its cobbled streets were gullies of yellow water. People hurried by with their heads pulled in like turtles, drawn deep into the collars of their overcoats. They didn't have umbrellas, because an umbrella is a manufactured article—and Russia is short of such things just at present.

We sat in a pastry shop eating chocolate éclairs and cakes soaked in rum with spirals of whipped cream on top. We were drinking coffee mélange—and discussing its immorality—discussing, in fact, those glorious pastry shops of Odessa and Kiev which we used to return to each night after a day on the raw steppes; out among the villages where the people were driving forty, fifty, eighty miles into Odessa to sell their ducks and chickens so that they could buy a few pounds of semi-sour black bread.

Such things as pastry shops and hunger, we decided, go arm in arm in this cruel world, even in Soviet Russia. It was life—and so we selected a cream pastry with candied fruit on top.

"Why can't I have a glass of tea?"

We looked up and saw a tall old man standing by the cashier's desk. In Russia, you know, in the co-operatives, you have to buy your check before you are served.

This old man stood before the girl cashier's coop with a 20-kopeck piece on his palsied palm. It had just been refused. He looked quite presentable. In fact, he was the most distinguished person in the shop. A fine old chap with Don Quixote moustache, white as snow, and a soft silvery beard. He wore a black astrakhan hat, and his blue overcoat had a collar of astrakhan too, although his shoes were a bit ragged.

" Why don't you take my money?"

When he said this for the third time the girl turned and called to someone behind the counter of chocolate-cream cakes. A man came out and took the old man by the arm. He twisted it. The old man gave a sharp growl and flung him off. He held out his 20-kopeck piece to the cashier.

" Chi," he said. " Tea."

By this time another man had come out from the back where he had been stacking meringues and cream puffs. He and the first man now each took an arm of the old man. They both twisted.

" Swine!" yelled the old fellow.

It was a real yell. But it finished at the doors—double doors because of the approach of winter—through which the two stalwart pastry stackers hurled him into the wet street. However, he came back. He came to the outer door and tried to wrench it open. Then the first pastry puffer let the door go wide, and as it opened he kicked the old man in the stomach. We could not hear the old man's yell, as the pastry puffers had slammed shut both doors.

But by now the old man had come along the glass-fronted shop, past rows of pink birthday cakes with

Maries and Veras iced on top, and here he opened another door. And as he came in he was kicked in the stomach again.

How he could eat after all that the Lord knows—but he scuttled back to the other door and tried that. Whereupon one of the pastry puffers, who had lurked in the street, hit him unexpectedly in the eye. He hit at him again, but missed—and was seized by the crowd. The crowd was divided in its opinion. Some thought that it was wrong to kick an old man in the stomach—it wasn't culture—and the Russians are very particular about that.

"He's drunk," sniffed the cashier.

"He's not," said another tea-drinker. "He's just a little wrong in the head."

"Yes," laughed another. "It's more than tea he wants."

The old man was standing at the outside window just opposite our table, looking at our pastry with the candied fruit on top. The injured eye was watering and the other wept in sympathy.

He was weeping, but he had not lost his dignity—or his courage. The two young men together would not have made up his age, but he was only waiting a chance to come and have another go at them.

The crowd was getting deeper and deeper all round him. He wept some more when we went outside to ask him about his discomfiture, and when we suggested that he come in and have a glass of tea with us he accepted our offer instantly. He sat down at our table and he took off his black astrakhan hat. And all his natural gentle good manners came back to him.

He was a bit exhausted for the moment after his fight with the two pastry wallopers. His crying, somehow, did not seem undignified, but only tragic. He was almost spent.

" Drink your tea," we said.

The girl waitress put it down reproachfully and pointed to her hand. She, too, had got quite a bump in the fracas.

" Huh!" said the old man. " Look at my eye!"

She was a good-natured creature and he bore her no malice. But every time he saw his old enemy, the huge pastry puffer, he twisted his white moustache in imitation of that bravo's fierce black moustachios, and pointing at him, remarked:

" Swine!"

He drank his tea, bringing out of his pocket a small piece of greyish bread. One could see he was really hungry. Every now and then his sorrows would overcome him afresh and he would weep again. Quietly.

" This shop?" he said. " Ha! Oh, I had a beautiful shop! You should have seen my shop!"

Such cakes he used to have! " Wonderful vanilla ices!" Liqueurs. Apricot brandy . . . And as he told us of it his sorrow overcame him completely. " It's gone! It's gone!" he cried. " They've taken it all away. . . ."

We stared at him embarrassed. What could one say to comfort a man who had lost such a magnificent shop? We could imagine its rich arcade in old Kharkov. . . .

And then the poor old boy made his one mistake.

He dug a bundle of papers from his pocket and fished one out. It was a sort of handbill on cheap yellow paper, such as are distributed in the streets, and it was a description of a little tobacconist's, which also sold that muddle of other things that such little places do sell—sweets, soft drinks, newspapers. The saddest part of the whole affair was that little shop.

But the finest thing in his life now was the memory of that splendid, marvellous shop—which has never been.

CHAPTER XIX

COMRADES AT PLAY

LENINGRAD'S surviving night-life is on the Hotel Europe roof. It is called a cabaret. A semi-American elevator-boy takes you up.

"That's me. Sure thing. Where'd I learn to talk English?—why, right out in little old Seattle, U.S.A. Came back here—went broke—gotta stay—that's me. Sure I can get back if I want to—ain't done nothing wrong. How's things here?—nitchevo—guess these people don't know how to spend money, that's all. Fifth floor, far's I go—cabaret."

Fifth floor, uniformed cloak-boy waiting to take your coats. Give him sixpence before he gives you your check. Watch him write the number on the bottom of your goloshes. Hundreds of pairs of goloshes. Hundreds of portfolios—every comrade wears goloshes, carries a portfolio, usually carries a revolver. Waiters in white duck suits, canvas "sneakers," rushing past with dishes of Salad Olivier. Head waiter, head waiter in dinner-jacket, standing at foot of midnight cabaret stairs, clasping a menu in fat white hand, arguing just at present with a red-headed comrade. Comrade dressed in high black leather boots, trousers stuffed in, brown sweater under blue serge suit—tight as an owl—wants to know why he can't get in. Saying something like this:

" Wassat? Mean to tell me every table's engaged? Can't I see half a dozen empty ones myself? Huh! Bourgeois!—yah—that's what you are. Bourgeois! I'm gonna report you to the Waiters' Soujouse."

Head waiter turns pale, bows to comrade, gives him remote table far corner by the wall. Tells waiter to take his order, whispers in waiter's ear to take order—and forget it. Comrade sits there waiting. Looks both mad and uncomfortable. His short red hair lies down all around his head as if it had been poured off his skull. He is keeping only one eye open at a time. . . .

His wife is dressed in a brown woollen garment; she wears white cotton stockings and high black buttoned kid boots; she had a green woollen shawl wrapped around her head, but now she's got it draped round her neck; she's telling her husband that he hasn't any " guts," to let a bourgeois head waiter treat them like this. She's seen a lot of women on the Europaski roof in semi-silk and low necks:

" So that's what the revolution's coming to!" she taunts her husband.

Her husband, being a man, having none of the feminine guile—or guts—smiles uncomfortably. The other couple with him wait to see what he'll do. In the meantime the orchestra plays " Last night on the back porch I loved her most of all," and factory girls in skirts so short that you cannot help but see and know all, do a perfectly ferocious Russian Charleston across the smooth, beautifully made parquet floor. The orchestra is good, the food is not too bad, yet there is something lacking. It's hard to put a name to it. But there is a certain quality missing from the gaiety of

comrades at play. " She was po-or—but she was honest—vic-tim o-o-f a rich man's whim . . ." Is it essential that there should be this element of " sin " to make night-life gay? It doesn't make much difference what city you are in—Leningrad, Moscow, Saratov, Tiflis, Baku—any amount of the kick has gone out of night-life simply because there is nothing going on that is corrupt. The whole thing is too beastly healthy. It's like dancing with your wife!

There is no " forbidden fruit "—that's the tragedy of present-day Russia. That's the thing that makes boot-leg " likker " so sweet. And it's all gone.

In the old days Petrograd and Moscow were the cities of a hundred cabarets. Yar's, Strelnas, the Aquarium, the Villa Rhodie—with girls dancing, private cabinets, the waiters bringing crawfish and vodka while you boasted—anything and everything seemed possible then. Russia was the land of unlimited impossibilities. . . . You might steal a general's girl and a cossack's horse, and race along the snow-speckled dark streets. . . . But not now. No, the three women of the oldest profession in the world who sit every night by themselves on the Hotel Europe roof—they are hard put to to display some attraction that would compete with their orthodox sisters in tow of comrades so advanced. In fact, watching the night-life, wondering what these sirens have to offer, you begin to wonder how they really can exist, and you hit upon one of life's axioms that the forbidden fruit is always the most sweet—that is what lures comrades on. Nothing is worth anything if you get it for nothing.

But the worst tragedy of Russian life is the fact that

home-life has been destroyed. That, perhaps, is the greatest tragedy of modern, Bolshevik, Russia. The very climate helped to make Russian home-life one of the gayest in the world. Six long, long months of frozen winter; Leningrad, Moscow, almost shut off from the sun. Dark frozen streets. People riding out to parties in sleighs. Little sleighs, so small that the man had to hold the girl in with his arm round her waist (quite proper, it was the fashion in those days), galloping through the starry night and the flying snow. . . . Smiling servants taking your coats at the door (and Russian servants felt cheated if you didn't incessantly entertain!), the glittering drawing-room, bottles on the sideboard, low-necked, cool-armed provocative women. . . . All of this was consummated, made the very vitals of Life, by the frozen winter outside. The double windows rimmed you in. . . . In all the world there was nothing so intimate as the "feel" and security of these Russian parties—that never began before 11 p.m.

They are—well, not quite gone. They exist. Not, of course, as the order of the day. Secretly, very often, as the ethics of proletarianism are against such jollity as this. Then, in Moscow, with three or four families in a single compartment, there simply is not room. The main point is that the proletariat, as such, has not yet learned how to enjoy itself. Night-life was the perquisite of the "idle rich." The comrades' sport may be "healthier," but it is terribly dull.

CHAPTER XX

A NIGHT VISITOR

HE was not an old man, although his worn cheeks were covered with a stubble of white hairs. He peered behind him, up and down the hall, before he softly closed the door of my room.

"I have heard," he said, "that you are buying old things."

My heart sank, for he was the third person who had been in my room that evening; and I could not bear sending these people away. How could I buy a bit of lace that was fondled so regretfully by the old lady who tried to sell it? Or tell this wretched man that his bronze ikons were worthless, and could be picked up in the street markets for just one-tenth of the price he was asking? Bits of old belongings, treasured jealously against such an evil day as this, pondered over, valued with the hope of what they might bring, had reached an incalculable value in his mind. It would be only cruel to encourage him.

"No," I said firmly, "I really do not want any bronze ikons. I only wish I did, but these are not old ones."

He smiled. "I do not know," he said. "I—I thought you might like them?"

I shook my head. It was best to be firm.

" But this——"

Watching my face, in the hope of seeing some desire aroused, he unwrapped a grimy wooden ikon. An indistinct slab, almost obliterated by years of candle smoke; the kneeling figures of two saints before a bronze cross which had been set into the wood. It was tremendously heavy, set with brass, and very ugly.

I steeled myself.

" It's quite nice," I said, " but——"

His lips set in that glassy grin and my heart failed me. I put the ikon on the floor, sat down on my bed, and stared at it. I was trying to think. I did not want the ikon; in fact, I hated it.

" It's not old," I said.

" I don't know. My father bought it from the monastery. I remember it when I was a boy. It was supposed to be very valuable. But I don't know anything about the value of ikons; you are free to give me what you think it is worth."

This was awful! Now I had to name its price. I knew that it was worth about five roubles.

" Have you always lived here?" I asked.

" Yes, I was born here. Our—our property was here. Then, of course, I went to the university in St. Petersburg and . . ."

St. Petersburg! How that name dated it all. He changed it quickly to Leningrad even as he spoke, as if afraid I might suspect him of anti-Soviet propaganda. He had a tendency to stand up and finger his hat, which was very embarrassing.

" Twenty-five roubles," he said suddenly.

I shook my head.

" Look here," I told him. " I don't want to bargain with you. It's not a question of the price. It just doesn't please me, that's all."

" Twenty."

I shook my head again, and stared at the ikon lying on the floor. Visions rose before me; the Government commission-shop in Leningrad, old vases and crested cigarette-cases, opera cloaks, an old music-box, turned on for a customer, tinkling out a forgotten waltz . . . a song of the '80's. . . . The old man I had talked with that very morning trying to sell me old prints, photographs, even the illustrations he had torn out of some books. Eleven years now since the Revolution, and these people still had a few trinkets to sell. . . .

" Fifteen—no, take it."

" Don't!" I said, getting up. " I'll take it. In fact, I think I like it very much."

He sucked in his breath.

" Thank you," he said, thrusting my money in his pocket. " It is very difficult to live."

He went to the door, opened it a crack, and looked down the hall. Then the door closed behind him.

" Yes," said the ikon-restorer in Moscow, " it's not much good. Eighteenth century at the best. But this bronze cross, the figure of Christ, this is excellent—sixteenth, I would say. It's worth about twenty-five roubles."

I felt sick. The man had come into my room in Rostoff and gone out—and I did not even know his name.

CHAPTER XXI

THE MONASTERY

"WAIT a moment, Little Pigeon."

Two Black monks were down behind the door of their deserted monastery. They were cutting a pane of glass to patch a hole. One of them held a candle in his hand, the other was measuring. They were waiting for another monk who had gone off to draw water. He appeared as I waited outside the monastery in the cold winter's night. He came up through the snows from the sighing pine-woods along the shores of Lake Ilman. He was utterly black—black beard, black cone hat, black flowing skirts like a woman, and, like a peasant woman, he was carrying a wooden yoke with two ice-coated water buckets dangling from its ends. His eyes were black as night itself, staring at me with either surprise or hate, I could not tell which.

"You are too late," he said coldly.

Whether he meant that I was too late in the night or in the epoch of Georgiev monastery, whatever it was, he did not mean to let me in until the Communist with me handed him a letter from the Ispolkom of Novgorod. He held it up near the broken hole in the door and read it. Then he called to his brother monks to let us in.

" American," he said, pointing at me, as if it were a password. The two monks stood up, their long greasy hair falling down over their shoulders. They did not smile. But one of them held up his candle, and as he did so the darkness lightened overhead, and I saw the faces of old saints staring down at us. It gave me the strange feeling of being some character in a tale of the Middle Ages. For Georgiev monastery is remote from this world. You see it as you cross the Velkhov going into old Novgorod—a long line of white, set in the pine-forest far up the low right bank, its ten bright golden domes sitting like a cluster of tangerines on the dark tips of the wood.

To get there we had driven in little sleighs across the frozen flat country, walked along a dark, tree-lined dyke road, where the shrill wind had swept the snow bare, and frozen plaques of water were lying on either side of us, and where, with our own faces freezing, we saw two peasant women washing clothes through a hole they had chopped in the ice! We had come through snowdrifts to the wall of the monastery, entered a courtyard like a farm's, where some horses were being unharnessed and a great pile of steaming manure was melting and staining the snows, where a recalcitrant peasant cursed—

" Damned if I know where the monks are!"

The peasants do not like monks. Nor priests. If you doubt that, make a list of a hundred Russian proverbs—that condensed philosophy of peasants—and you will find that over ninety of them are sacrilegious.

" Be born, baptised, marry and die—and you will pay the priest for all of it."

" The monk has the beard of an apostle—and the moustache of the devil."

" Don't worry when a priest enters your house—and he will soon start to beg."

" God loves the rich and the rich love God."

And that terrible Moscow blasphemy:

" Everyone steals except Christ—and He would if His hands were not nailed to the Cross."

These proverbs indicate many of the reasons why the Church failed in Russia, why, for instance, the Feofany monastery outside Kiev is now a refuge for homeless children, why, out of the hundred and twenty monks who once inhabited Georgiev, only eight are left.

" Where are the others?" I asked.

" Oh, they've gone," quickly put in the Communist.

I did not ask him where. I had an idea that many of them had gone to a place from whence they could never come back. But the monk, struggling with a massive key, favoured us both with a glare, as if daring us to put that question openly. He was obeying the Communist and the request of the Novgorod Ispolkom to show me Georgiev monastery, but he was letting us know that he detested the lot of us. We were infidels!

His defiance had more than a personal significance. It was symptomatic of the Russian priesthood of today, where only the strongest can survive. Under this atheistic rule the Church is having its trial by fire; its disciples are suffering a martyrdom. It had become too fat in the days of the Tzars. It worked for them and not for Christ. A few priests or monks might have

stood out for Christian principles, but the Church as a whole was preaching future glories instead of trying to alleviate the misery on earth. The Communists declare that the Church tried to drug them against resistance, persuading the people to put up with their misery in hopes of the world to come; and beside that famous Iberian Virgin in Moscow they placed the placard—"Religion is the opiate of the people." The old Russian Church was really an arm of the Government.

Georgiev monastery is like a walled city with a great church that is honeycombed with churches itself. Its ornate chapels are in tiers, one above another. They have jewelled ikons of silver and gold. Even in that cold darkness they gave a warm sense of assurance and richness. They might have been garish in a brighter light, but by that one flickering candle Georgiev monastery glowed like a treasure-vault beside the barren shores of Lake Ilman.

There were ikons in the log-houses of the wretched little fishing villages beside that frozen lake. I saw them. I sat in an old log cabin with the local shoemaker, a man so poor that he had not even bread, and his four children were sleeping like a little den of foxes, half naked, huddled together for warmth among the fusty bedding on top of his clay stove. His cabin was so low that my head almost touched the ceiling, so poorly repaired that we could feel the winds off the frozen lake—and yet in one corner were three shining silver ikons. I saw another trio of ikons in the cabin of an old fisherman; they held the place of honour in his log-walled home. He showed them to me, smiling proudly; he was still a Christian.

It was not so much that the Russians had lost their faith in God as it was that they were bitterly dissatisfied with these latter-day priests who attempted to interpret Him. They were going to Him direct, and not through the priests. And it occurred to me as we drove through the snows away from that dark frozen lake and left Georgiev monastery, white and silent as a ghost in the black night, that whatever might happen to the surviving eight monks they were alone with their God —and this ordeal was the best thing that could have happened to the decadent Russian Church.

CHAPTER XXII

THE FINEST IKON

"I LOVE it, love it, love it; it's the finest ikon in all the world!"

Davidov, the "restorer," leaned over the thirteenth-century ikon of St. Nicholas, an ancient wooden ikon as big as a door. He dipped his brush in a special preparation of spirits and smeared it over the jewelled robe of the saint. Then he struck a match and lighted it. We watched him with utter horror. The flame died, and then Davidov dipped the brush in another bottle of spirits and rubbed it over the hot paint. As he rubbed, the precious robe turned into yellow scum—all except the row of raised jewels. Davidov smiled and gave a flick to the curly ends of his red moustache. His blue eyes lighted with a cold fire themselves as he looked down on his destruction. He leaned over it with a surgeon's scalpel in his delicate fingers and began to scrape away the softened paint.

"Look! One—two—three—four—five . . ." And there was another robe. It came from under the surface of the old one, or the newer one, rather, that might have been put on one or two hundred years later! "Five—six . . ." Davidov counted the new jewels as they appeared: he was getting back to the original—getting down through the paint to nearly eight hundred years ago.

It savoured of black magic—except that all the world around was blanketed with white snow, and we were in the little Russian town of Novgorod. That is to say, it is a town now, but in the days when this ikon was being created Novgorod was one of the greatest cities in the world. Its churches and its merchants were laden with gold. The austere white walls of its great St. Sophia had been standing nearly two hundred years. Novgorod had a factory of its own over on the Norse island of Wisby; it was trading with Byzantium and Arabia to the east, with the Black Sea south, with the Germans west, and the Scandinavians north. There were nearly 400,000 people within its great walls . . . All of that was in this ikon, in the colours, the freedom, the richness. No wonder that Davidov, as he removed painting after painting—he removed eight surfaces to get down to the original—no wonder that, as the colours richened and deepened and the expression on Nicholas's face became greater and more pure, he gasped and cried out in his tiny little workshop above the ikon museum. For he was travelling backward through history—uncovering with his hands eight hundred years!

Incredible and fascinating sight. We could not believe our own eyes that Davidov was actually removing only one superimposed ikon at a time. Why didn't his keen surgeon's scalpel scrape through? When the paint softened, how was it that he could take off a painting of six hundred years ago and leave the one that had been done a hundred years before that? It was the strength of the spirit, explained Davidov. This was a soft spirit, of special combination; it had

been " timed " to soften only one coat of paint. If he had put on a hard spirit, why, the greatest ikon in the world would have been lost.

Nicholas came from Asia Minor. His face on the golden ikon is tanned, his forehead high-domed, his nose sharp and aquiline. His hair is scant, short-cut and grey, and he wears a close-clipped grey beard. But his eyes—that's what you see as you go back through the ikons, it's what the moderns cannot get—his eyes burn with a holy fire.

Over a hundred men are supposed to have worked on him. Around the central plaque are sixteen square panels showing events in his life: his birth, his ordainment; he sets out, he reaches an Eastern city—you see him above the bowed populace; he is being brought gifts—a man brings a horse, and both horse and man kneel down before him. He crosses a sea—done in beautiful cream waves—and above him three black devils dangle by their legs. They are supposed to show three catastrophes that befell him on the way, which he must have overcome, for another panel shows him turning the government of a huge city over to a humble peasant —an object-lesson in humility.

Davidov had worked over a year on this ikon. He had taken hundreds of photographs, something similar to X rays, which enabled him to divine whether there was another painting underneath each successive coat. He had taken off eight distinct ikons, and with each one Nicholas had become more miraculous, so that now Davidov stood shaking his head over his finished work, saying, " I love it, love it, love it; it's the finest ikon in all the world!"

But below in the Novgorod museum of ikons were other ikons which, if not as great or greater, are surely the finest collection in the world. It is well worth going around the world to see them, for an ikon is a most satisfying form of art. It grows upon you more than any other. Ikons make other forms of art seem sensual and garish. They get down to bed-rock—to a sort of pure flame of beauty and austerity. A pureness that was tarnished by the oncoming centuries. You can see this in Novgorod (and it is perhaps the one place in the world where you can see it most strikingly, because many of these " restored " ikons have not been exhibited). You see it in the faces of " The Praying Novgoroders," or in that vivid epitome of ancient warfare, " The Siege of Novgorod by the Suzdal Troops." Ikons vivid with both feeling and colour, Novgoroders sallying out from their castellated walls against the blue-helmeted Suzdal troops, flights of arrows going into the advancing horsemen. Inspired artists were creating these things in Novgorod at the same time that King John of England and his knights were gnawing bones in their banqueting-halls. There was fervour and glory in these ikons of Russia until they felt the Western influence, and here in Novgorod you can see the fleshy saints of Simon Ushakov looking like stuffed Dutchmen, their eyes cynical and scheming.

So there is Novgorod today, a remote Russian country town by its frozen river. The red walls of its kremlin still stand up across the white snows; the great golden helmet of St. Sophia still shines like a sun against the cold sky—it is strangely like an old ikon itself—almost effaced. And in a little room over the street, in

which the peasants buy and sell cattle, cordwood and oats from their sleds, works Davidov, the " restorer "; burning and scraping back to the pure spirit of the thirteenth century—the epoch of Lord Novgorod the Great.

Davidov, working with his scalpel, was the first man to stare at the face of this great St. Nicholas for nearly eight hundred years!

CHAPTER XXIII

THE WAR AGAINST GOD

" We implore your solicitation. Do not let our last church be closed. They held a meeting and a resolution was passed by them saying that our cathedral should be closed on April 1st, 1929. We devotees have not been at the meeting. That is why we beg to revoke that decision and let us have the cathedral for us devotees whose number exceed 2,000 people in the entire volost (village district). Moreover, the great fast has come, and without God and Church we cannot exist. I implore you to pay attention to my requests. An eternal thanks will be your reward.

" Help us. " A DEVOTEE."

THIS note was thrust into my hand as I stood among the weeping peasants outside the Borisoglybsk cathedral in the monastery of that name. Men and women were crying, begging, pleading with us to help them save their last church. It was an agonising experience.

What could one do except to stand there, dumbly, listening to their pleading, and tell them that this was Russia? . . . How could one know the truth? I could not count the people in the volost; I wasn't there at the meeting, when, as the Communist policemen and members of the local Ispolkom assured me, over half the delegates had raised their hands to vote for the closing of the church. " Our delegates do not represent us," wailed these peasants; " our delegate has been four

months in jail . . ." And dozens of them declared they could have no delegate as they had "lost their voice"—the right to vote; they were rated as Nepmen, Kulaks, and former bourgeoisie. It seemed hopeless to try and sort out the rights and wrongs of such a case. Hopeless, except for the fact that here were several hundred people, men and women, many of whom were weeping because Borisoglybsk was to be closed. That, it seemed, was sufficient argument in itself.

"You don't understand," said the Communists, when I asked them why they were so intolerant. "There is a strong Kulak element in this volost—they fight every reform. It is not true what they say to you about bread—lots of them have bread in their houses."

"We have no bread," wailed the peasants; "we have no cloth, nothing to eat or drink, no work, no money, only our church. And now they want to take that!"

There was another church, said the Communists, within a mile and a half. Borisoglybsk, the entire monastery, was to be turned into a museum. When I pointed out that it was the least ancient of all the churches inside those rambling yellow fortress walls, so modern that the man was still living (in New York!) who had painted some of its frescoes, and that the other churches dated from the sixteenth century, the Communists nodded and agreed. Nevertheless, an order was an order; and here it is (actual copy):

To the filiation of the Borisoglybsk Museum.

To the Rostoff district Executive Committee for pronouncement to all devotees; carbon to the Rostov Museum and also to the Central Executive Comittee (VZIK).

Extract of the protocol of meeting held by the Presidium of the Yaroslavl Province Executive Committee of the Soviets of October 2nd, 1928.

Question discussed.	*Decided.*
5. About the breaking of the contract signed with the congregation of the Borisoglybsk monastery and about the closing of the church. Document of the Rostoff District Executive Committee No. 264. Comrade Vorontzov's report Case No. 22.	1. As it was discovered that the Borisoglybsk religious congregation did not include a number of religious and other kinds of articles in the inventory of the church property, and moreover as two military kitchens have been discovered in the church and cellar. As the congregation violated the collective contract concerning the exploitation of the church, it has been decided to break the concluded bargain.

2. One has to take into consideration that at a distance of $1\frac{1}{2}$ kilometres there is a church at the Trinity Bor, able to hold all the members of the Borisoglybsky congregation, and also that there is a cemetery close to the church, while the monastery at Borisoglybsk is an old building, partly delivered to the Rostoff Museum, which is expected to spread its activity there. That is why it is considered necessary to have the church of the Borisoglybsk monastery closed as well as the cemetery liquidated. The church building should be handed over to the Museum. We are waiting for the sanction of the All Russian Executive Committee.

3. The Rostoff District Executive Committee has to notify the religious congregation about the above-mentioned decision. This document has been verified by the head of the Office, Brovkin.

OVSIANNIKOV,
Secretary.

This copy is correct.

VAKHTIAROV,
Secretary of the District Executive Committee.

There was the document, all filled out and stamped and sealed, as all good Soviet documents are, and probably as full of inaccuracies as most of them. Two military kitchens had been found in the cellar of the church!

The peasants gathered in a great mob inside the medieval towered gates of the monastery, watching me as I walked the three-quarters of a mile around the wooden-roofed battlements of its high fortress walls. Inside this great area were churches painted a bright canary yellow, their clustered domes forming vivid patches of blue and green against the white clouds of the sky. A trio of priests, swinging incense, walked through the grove of tall oaks in its park, chanting, and into a clump of pines, where, among the leaning forest of crosses, they sang Halleluiahs over a new-made grave.

"It's like an operetta," laughed a young Communist, as we looked down on this scene.

Borisoglybsky is ten miles from a railroad, by a local cart or sleigh. But it might have been cut off from the world entirely as far as its peasants' hope of securing assistance was concerned—and I was a man from "outside." They rushed upon me as soon as I came down from the walls, brushing aside the police, who, to allay the peasants' tempers, ordered me from them again and into the office of the museum, where they again examined my documents. This was the third time they had done this, showing that they were clearly at a loss as to just how to handle such a predicament. Then, with great politeness, they let me go again—and the peasants closed in.

They wanted me to come into their church, where,

with another crowd of peasants around him, I found a frightened priest. He was afraid to talk to me, and I did not want to talk to him—as I knew it would mean trouble for him. I edged away, and the peasants pulled me further in from the low heated room of the small vestibule in which they were worshipping into the high vaulted interior of the real church, where golden ikons and painted frescoes covered every inch of the towering walls.

They pressed about me—old men, like gnomes, and bent old women, dressed in witches' rags. They made horrid noises as they wept with their toothless gums. One woman had only one eye; and another, a typical spinster, who had some disease so that she wore cupped lenses over her eyes, with wisps of hair to partly hide them, put her earnest face close to mine and begged: "Tell them to leave us our religion—it is all that we have!" Another woman clenched her fists and said her children were not allowed to go to school. A man sneering touched the sleeve of his coat and said: "They call me a Kulak because I have this." And one man, about forty he was, shook his head glumly when I said that the parents must teach the children themselves.

"No," he said, in a heavy-throated voice that sounded like a prophecy in that painted church. "No—our children will have no God."

CHAPTER XXIV

THE VILLAGE WORLD

"WELL, that factory is still going," said the Communist, as we picked our way along the mud streets of Barahkti. He pointed to the church. "But just you see how many people are in it."

The church stood behind a wooden fence off the dirty village street. It was an old wooden Ukrainian country church, with a grey wooden dome and sharp steeple; and if buildings can have any expression, this church of Barahkti looked both alarmed and on the defensive. It was still "going," as the Communist put it, but it was being inspected now by the president of the village Soviet, the visitor and several young Communists—all of whom were atheists. "Down with religion, drunkenness, smoking and hooliganism!" was their motto—and no wonder the church looked a bit frightened. The village of Barahkti was several miles from a railroad in the heart of a dark, lonely steppe.

I went inside the church. Its interior was grey-painted along the lower walls to imitate stone. It was as bright as a toy-shop with painted ikons and gold-framed Virgins, little tapers with flames like pine-trees burning before its gilded iconastas. All the ikons were draped with peasant cloth, embroidered with

red stitchwork of peasant pattern, leaves, and crosses and black crows. When I first entered, the church was empty except for a few peasants sweeping its floor for the saints' day on the morrow. Then some peasant women came in, almost angrily, and stood as if transfixed before the iconastas. They were nearly all of them old. Some men entered and stood apart, on the right side of the church, beside the priest whose deep resonant chanting seemed to be trying to fill the whole structure—trying to make up for those booming peasant choruses of the past. When I turned to go out I saw that the president of the village Soviet—an atheist—had followed me. He was standing by my shoulder, watching.

"The Church is no good," said the Communist. "It blinds us to our enemies. The Church says that all men should love one another. That is not true—the capitalist is always our enemy." He said he neither drank nor believed in God, because both of them clouded one's brain. . . .

The little village of Barahkti was just a cluster of thatched houses in a ravine of barren steppe. The houses were like those drawn by children: a plain square with one or two windows stuck in—rather crooked—like the witch's house in Hansel and Gretel. But the thatch was a foot thick, cut in steps down the roof edges like the fin of a fish. And behind the village on the edge of the ravine stood several windmills, waving their gaunt arms to grind the grain. The houses were built of logs plastered smooth with mud. Some were yellow as their original clay but some were painted white, and they had great shafts of wheat

bound around them outside, like a Kanaka girdle, to keep them warm during the long winter snow.

Inside the floor was of earth, damped down and rubbed smooth. The stove was built of clay, whitewashed and clean, and although the bread for several weeks could be baked in these large ovens, the family always slept on top of the stove. The stove was higher than a man's head, and there were steps leading up to the flat sleeping platform. A fire of straw in the oven below, a ring of it, usually, around the baking loaves of black bread, keeps the family cot warm; and the whitewashed beamed ceiling not much over an arm's reach overhead makes the whole affair very cosy. The family goes to bed, like sardines, all in one row.

This fireplace is whitewashed three or four times a year, together with the smooth mud walls and ceiling. Sometimes it is tinted with colours of pale blue and cerise. Wooden benches stand along the walls, with wooden bowls and wooden spoons—the hay for fire and cooking is usually piled in one corner. The clay floor is damped down and smoothed, so that very often it looks like boards. These huts, some of them old and awry, with the moss green as grass on their thatched roofs, the wooden church, school and co-operative store are the basis of Ukrainian life.

The school of Barahkti was a fairly modern affair of yellow brick. And here one sees the chasm between the old Russia and the new. Although less than 25 per cent. of the school teachers are Communists, they are all forced to teach Communism. Every school has its club or communal room, with pictures of Lenin, Stalin and Rykov; its own hand-written monthly news-

paper, stuck on the wall, most of the tone being jeeringly sacrilegious. That is the basic force underlying all work—to make good Communists. And although such an effort is vital to the Communist programme, to explain communism and its advantages to the younger generation, so that they shall not be so stubbornly, blindly and instinctively against it as the old people—and although these local Communist teachers are almost invariably industrious, conscientious and likable people, they seem to suffer from the fact that they are the intelligentsia, they are too far ahead, it seems, of the mass in what is almost a frantic race towards CULTURE. As I look back on the village schoolrooms I have been in, I seem to see nothing but a grisly array of anatomical specimens—livers, hearts, spleens and articulated skeletons, mixed with Hemholtz resonators, vacuum pumps and bugs stuck on pins. I see before me, on the Barahkti village curriculum for country lads of eight to fourteen, the courses —German, Ukrainian, Russian—Sociology, Nature Study and Botany—which last being Agriculture, was really the only useful one on the list.

" Will all the steppes one day become fields?" began the poem in the school newspaper—*The New Colonist of the Steppes*. " No," was the candid second line of this youthful opus, " they are not all fields because we are not strong enough to make them so."

The school teacher, after showing where, during these hard times of the bread shortage, they fed the school children three meals a day for a total charge of 6d.—lined up his male converts and put them through a course of physical jerks. Which, with apa-

thetic raising and turning of palms, looked ridiculously like a mass conversation on the East Side of New York. This performance, gone through for forty-five minutes once a week, is called FIZKULTURA.

Football, a barbaric game, is prohibited to pupils under sixteen.

The village had an agricultural bank which lent money at 6 per cent. against land, horses and cattle for seven years. £30 was the maximum, but the loans averaged between £5 and £6. Enough, in most cases, to free the poorer peasant from having to borrow money from the richer, the Kulaks, at their pawnbroker's rates. The only question is: If a peasant is very poor, will his security be good enough to get a loan?

Like all Russian villages, it was in a civil war of transition, Church *versus* Communism, old *versus* new; a delight to the tourist, a ghastly puzzle to the Communist, and a world in disorder to its own primitive inhabitants.

CHAPTER XXV

THE OLD MILL

OFTEN, as you travel across the flat skyline of Russia, you see these wooden windmills waving their crazy arms. Sometimes they have six arms, which makes them even more crazy. Their village world is so remote from your own that it hardly ever occurs to you that they are actually grinding grain, that there is a dusty miller inside them, and that up in the second story of the windmill, shaking and rumbling as the big vanes sweep round, there is a little cluster of bearded peasants, sitting in semi-darkness, talking about bread.

Their talk was very serious as we climbed up into the grinding-room of this wooden windmill on the Rumanian frontier. Instead of thirty poods per hectare from their land, this year had given them only ten. In the last four months, in some districts, there had been no crop at all. The Government was shipping seed-cake to feed the cattle, but the horses' ribs were already sticking out. Things were so bad that the actual corn they were now grinding had been bought in Odessa.

Ominous—that a peasant should have to buy corn in Odessa!

Things were so bad, in fact, that the peasants weren't

even talking—and nothing could be worse than that. They stood silently, leaning against the shaking walls, watching the hopper, the notched wooden wheel rattling into the cogs of the square steel bar fixed into the stone, the clatter of the springboard pressed against it shaking a steady stream of corn kernels into the hole. A soft, sweet and warm mass of cornflour softly poured out of the chute. It smelled good, as if it were already being cooked.

Up aloft, under the powdered cobwebs, a booted peasant boy tilted more sacks of rustling corn into the bin. When the wind freshened from the Black Sea the vanes rushed around faster and faster, shaking the wooden mill, shooting out the sweet-smelling flour. And then the gale slackened, and we could feel the regular heave as a big wooden vane swept to within a foot of the ground and then swung upward . . . and around.

There was a window in this upper floor of the mill. I could lean out of it and see the big vanes sweep round; see the circle of wooden pegs, the danger line, stuck around us. For one of these huge vanes in full swing could almost cut you in half. I saw the little iron chain and tackle with which they turned the mill to face the wind. And beyond, along the marshes of the Dniester, I saw the houses of the village. They were made of baked clay, each house set in its mud yard behind a plaited rush fence. The river lay sparkling in the sun. A Roumanian soldier walked along a solid strip of land at the marshy edge, guarding Bessarabia—stolen back from the Russians.

He walked along in his high white sheepskin hat,

rifle slung over his back, only 200 yards away, and yet a detested object to the Russians who were watching him. He was watching the river, to see that no Bessarabians tried to swim back to Russia. His task would be harder within the next few days, when the river would be frozen, and they could walk across. In the black winter nights it would be hard to stop them, and about two hundred came across at this spot every year. In fact, he was very probably thinking about coming across himself, for many of this two hundred were Roumanian soldier deserters; and I had seen the raft which a Roumanian soldier pushed ahead of him eight miles up the river from Akermann. To the outside world Soviet Russia might seem an unenviable refuge, but it was a haven indeed to persecuted ex-Russians, escaping from the "forbidden land" of Bessarabia.

All of this I saw from the window of that rumbling old wooden windmill. The world outside, I knew, was agog with sensational tales of widespread peasant outrages. Here I was in the heart of it, in the southernmost point of the Odessa district, which was suffering from something that the outside world called a famine. It wasn't a famine. The peasants around me weren't talking about insurrection. They might, in undertones, have been discussing the advisability of murdering the local Selkor (newspaper correspondent), because the peasants always look upon him, reporting village conditions, as a Government spy. But the very fact of their having no grain of their own rendered the Selkor almost harmless. A Kulak, rich peasant and enemy of the Communists, can no longer be a Kulak when he

has nothing to secrete—no grain supply hidden for future speculation. The peasants were grumbling about the Government in just the same way that American farmers argue against Wall Street. Only, in this case, the Government was always the middleman, taking from one and giving to the other, as it thought best for the future of Soviet Russia.

In this very village I had seen the school where children were being given one good free meal a day. I had seen thin cattle on the edge of starvation; but I had also seen the Government statistics showing two hundred thousand tons of seed-cake and three hundred thousand tons of straw coming into the affected districts from Siberia.

The peasants, of course, were concerned only about their cattle and themselves. They had no perspective on the immensity of the problem: what it meant, for instance, to ship food across the rutted roads of the steppes into even their own village—and there were thousands of villages such as theirs. In fact, as one sat in the top of that wobbling old wooden windmill, and looked at the bearded, frowning faces of the peasants—not one of them emaciated—the thought came that there was something intractable about them—something so unutterably stupid that nothing would ever satisfy them.

In a village of German colonists through which we had passed their Teutonic enterprise seemed to have made them all Kulaks, so that, in the Soviet equalising process, almost all of them had been stripped of some wealth, such as cows, land or horses.

" We can't tell you the terrible things that are going

on here," they said to us. "Only God can tell you."

We were semi-arrested, lugged off to the local Soviet, almost as soon as we began to talk to them. A sort of "Huck Finn" farmer lad, with an army rifle, stood on guard at the door. And a harassed Communist, in a black under-shirt, came out, frowning, and scrutinised every inch of our passports. He looked sick, wretched and ill among the burly peasants. As a Communist he may not have believed in Heaven—but I could have imagined his description of Hell.

It would be the village we were in.

CHAPTER XXVI

KULAKS

AS the word "kulak" will probably become more and more familiar to Western ears as the months go on, it might be just as well to explain the brute. A Kulak is a rich peasant: rich, that is, in comparison to the other wretched Russian peasants. More than that, to really deserve his title, a Kulak must exploit other peasants—employ them. Even more, he must be a speculator, a peasant, who, instead of selling his grain to the Government for 2s. 10d. for 36 lbs., prefers to sell it to private buyers for 10s. The Kulaks hate the Communists and the Communists hate the Kulak. It is a lovely hate—they are always trying to down each other.

In fact, about the only mistake that that great brain of Lenin's seems to have made was when, after the Revolution, he was asked what should be done with the Kulaks, and he said:

"We will leave them to the poorer peasants."

It was a mistake, because things turned out the other way round; the poorer peasants were left to the Kulaks.

But how can the Kulaks exist if the Government is against them? That is a question that everyone keeps asking in Soviet Russia—including the Communists. They have taken away his vote, most of his land, horses

and cattle; his sons cannot serve in the Red Army; they cannot go to the village schools—at least, they have to take their chance last of all, if there is a vacancy after every other child has been placed; he cannot buy food, cloth or manufactured materials from the village co-operatives at their cheap prices, compared to private traders. He is taxed almost out of existence. And still the Kulak exists.

The reasons are simple: (1) Shortage of both foods and manufactured goods; (2) peasant ignorance. The first is primary—the second is fundamental. The first fluctuates with politics, seasons and weather. Its basic fault is the inability so far of the Russian worker to produce goods in sufficient quantities—and at a price which will meet the peasant's purse. The second really centres in a battle for the mind of the present and coming generation. That is why in the village schools you will see rooms practically dedicated to communism: pictures of Lenin, Stalin and Rykov, anti-bourgeoisie propaganda and sacrilegious pamphlets. That is why practically all the teachers are Communists. They are working night and day to explain Communism to the growing generation—before it comes into possession of the land. For there is the third, and almost incredible, reason for the Kulak—the deep-rooted desire in the heart of every peasant to be a petty bourgeois himself.

The shortage of food and manufactured goods gives the Kulak his strength, because it weakens the village co-operative. When the Government-supplied co-operative cannot supply him, the peasant must buy his food and goods from the private traders in the village bazaar. The private trader usually charges from two to

three times as much. Grey bread in the co-operative is 2½d. for 14½ ounces. It is 3¾d. in the bazaar. Same bread. Only—the co-operatives haven't got it. The Government cannot supply. They haven't got it because the private trader has been buying the grain from the Kulak—offering double and upwards the Government price.

Hence the Kulak.

The poorer peasants may all be members of the co-operative, they might all have cards, showing that they have sold their grain to the Government and are entitled to buy at the cheaper co-operative prices, but what's the use when the co-operative hasn't anything to sell?

It is the same with cloth, boots; the stuff comes in usually twice a month; the peasant is supposed to be able to buy what he likes. But the scene usually ends in a mêlée in which a yard a person would be considered a lucky purchase.

The private shop stands just across the mud village street, selling rolls of the same cloth, from 10 per cent. more to double the price. It all begins with the State Purchasing Department—how great a percentage of its total imports it is willing to allocate to manufactured goods. It carries on through the Soviet factories. In what quantities and at what price can they manufacture to meet peasant needs? And it usually ends in this scramble for goods in the ill-supplied village co-operative, with the private shop meeting the balance of demand, and the Kulak walking about among the disgruntled mob—encouraging discontent.

The Kulak has always been a force in the Russian village. Kulak means "fist." In the old days when the

peasants had no banks they were accustomed, when they wanted a horse or a cow, to borrow money from the richer peasant, the Kulak. He let them have it at exorbitant rates, usually exacting an additional tariff that the peasant should do so many days' work for him free, a system of peonage wherein a man, his wife and family would be slaving away for the Kulak—paying, in effect, two or three hundred per cent. interest on the money involved. And this function of the Kulak still exists. Despite the growing village banks he is still the amiable moneylender. And that is why, when a village meeting is called nowadays to vote whether or not the authorities should confiscate the Kulak's store of grain at Government price, the poor peasants will often vote for his side. They are not so sure about the Government's ability, but they know the Kulak will loan them money when they are in need.

That is why, declare the Communists, they talk so much about how to solve the Kulak problem. They say that he is valueless as a productive force, but he is a social danger. Western cities state that in their abortive attempts to extinguish the Kulak the Russians have severely crippled their agricultural production. The Russians say that the Kulaks at the most are only 5 per cent. of the total population, producing about 10 per cent. of the total crops, but that the Kulak is a force in the village which is directly opposed to the very essentials of Communism. They treat him as an enemy of the State, give him the death penalty whenever he murders a "Selkor" (village newspaper correspondent)—and the Kulaks killed 172 Selkors last year—but still the Kulak exists.

Even in their attempt to outwit him by giving him the worst sections of land in the village community the Kulaks turned the tables on the Communists by renting themselves and their horses to the poorer peasants on the good land, who thereby—as employers of labour—became Kulaks themselves.

The Kulak will last, declare candid Communists, until the final victory of Socialism.

CHAPTER XXVII

PEASANTS

I HAD no particular reason why I should have chosen Ogodotchi out of the several villages I had seen across frozen Lake Nero other than, perhaps, that I was drawn to it by the sight of the long line of sleds that trekked from it to Rostoff across the four miles of lake snows, so I couldn't tell the police why I had selected it.

"But why?" they protested. "You must have some reason for coming here?"

"Of course. I wanted to look at it." I stared at them, as if to ask: "And what reason could be better than that?" Then they demanded my documents . . .

This conversation took place before the dung-dirtied snows outside the little village "traktir," the peasant tea-room and restaurant, and—to judge by one unstable soul—the local pub. Ogodotchi is a fishing village of some six hundred souls, and all of them were heavy at the moment because of the shortage of bread—to say nothing about the fact that they had to pay five times the price for it. This was the conversation that ended with a policeman on either side of me; although, I must say, like all Russian policemen these days, they were very polite about it, reading my official press card with a sour grin, and only contenting themselves with a warning smile as they walked off; as though to say:

"We aren't altogether done with you yet, Mister; you'd better be careful"—an action which caused my peasant questioners no end of amusement.

A foreigner, just at present, does not need any introduction to the villages of Russia. Just let him drive in, get out of his sleigh, and there will be a crowd around him in an instant. He need not flatter himself that it is for his *beaux yeux* or charm of manner that they flock to his side. Far from it; it is just a reversion of the ancient mariner: the crowd stops the traveller and makes him listen. It has a tale to tell.

"Meat?" cried one peasant, when I asked him how he got along without bread, "why, we have only one chicken for the whole of the village!"

This witticism provoked a circle of grins, most of which were lost in bushy beards or the fat red cheeks of the peasant women. One thing was certain—they weren't starving, although that was the one thing they were trying to assure me was the case.

"Your horses are fat," I protested. "You look fat; and, as far as I can see, you all look strong and healthy. Now, you must be eating something."

"Potatoes!" they said contemptuously—and spat.

They also had oats, at one-third the price of wheat; but, to them, oats and potatoes were nothing. It was useless to tell them what the Irish had done on the good old "spud," nor would it have meant much to them if I had sung Scotland's glories, whelped on oats. Take potatoes away from an Irishman, oats from a Scot, or wheat from a Russian, and the fight is on.

And that little truism alone explains why you will hear howls about starvation from the Russian peasants

long, long before any of them really begin to get thin. It is my opinion that, outside of absolute wheat failures—like that which produced the famine of 1921—most of the Russian peasants could live quite well, and feel happy meanwhile, if they could only free themselves from the complex that bread is Life.

But that is a difficult thing to explain to a half-mad mob of angry villagers, all of whom are trying to talk at once. Somewhere in the argument I lost my wife. When I turned around she was no longer there. Some said she had gone into the church, to which I walked, followed by my crowd. I passed the head of the Ispolkom (local city hall) and police, who rewarded me with another warning smile. It was all right for me, because I was a foreigner; but I admired the grey-haired peasant by my side who spat in the direction of the police and led me inside. He bought a candle which he set up for me, but I could not find my wife.

Eventually I discovered a small boy pulling at my coat, who tried by signs and grins to show me that he knew where she was. I followed him down the snowy street, past the little log cabins with their lacy fret-worked wooden window-frames, and up through an unpainted log hall into a peasant fisherman's home. In the centre of a crowded circle of peasant men and women I found my wife.

" Be careful where you sit down," she said quickly; " they're all over the place!"

I thought, at first, she meant the peasants. Then she explained it was bedbugs, lice—" and those!" she said, shuddering, and I saw a parade of croton-bugs walking up and down the lace curtains. I saw more wild-

life in that hut than I have ever met with in all my life, which is saying something. I sat down desperately on the wooden wall-bench beside my wife. Courtesy made us drink the tea that the old grandmother made for us, pouring it out into their prize china cups, which she had carefully cleaned with her dress. You cannot injure the feelings of people who offer you their last bits of sugar—and bread.

" We have other Tzars," they said darkly, telling us of their woes. Wheat flour was anywhere from £1 4s. to £1 10s. for 36 pounds; potato flour was 8s.; and one woman showed us a handful of wheat and chaff which, she declared, cost 12s. for 36 pounds. The co-operative store should have been able to supply them with black bread for 1½d. a pound—but there hadn't been any bread in the co-operative since December 31. It was the same way with cloth; and one man stood up, displaying a coat made of rags, and said: " This is the way a peasant dresses!"

What was life like in America? Did people have bread there? All they wanted—and white! My God! How much did a labourer make in America? Questions that, when I tried to show them the different scale of living (how false it was to compare them!), only bewildered me as much as it did them. They were a good hundred years behind us in evolution—a delicate topic to discuss. In some ways, by their very primitiveness, they were even better off. And much of their misery, I believed, was greatly their own fault, an inherited inability to make the most of what they had. You can't explain such a complex civilisation as America's to a peasant. I felt hopeless and helpless before their dark

minds, especially when one asked me when would the *war* start.

" What war?" I asked.

He grinned at me slyly, as if I were trying to deceive him! It was all right, he nodded, I knew very well what war he was talking about. What he wanted to know was, when would it start?

I watched the parade of a million bedbugs, lice and cockroaches. I could have suggested a good war to him right there.

CHAPTER XXVIII

YARMOCK!—THE FAIR!

IT was barely seven on a cold, snow-swept windy morning; and yet the peasants were already well lined up for the great Rostoff fair. They were parking their sleds in long lines like streets across the snowy field outside the low buildings that fringe the pink kremlin walls. Thousands of them.

The sleds were primitive, made with axe and hack-saw. Unpainted, the runners made of turned-up logs, steel shod, with wicker baskets on top of a flying triangle of wooded wings. A broad V of wood and wicker gave width to the sled and helped to act as fenders in the jostle of the streets. It prevented the sled from capsizing when it rocked into the deep ruts of the much-travelled roads. The sleds were ancient, their design dating long before Peter the Great; but they are still used for the same manifold and highly ingenious purposes. By removing the wicker basket and putting on a flat platform of boards they are turned into hay sleds, on which half a ton of sweet-smelling fodder can be piled. By using the wicker-work basket they become containers for a square metre of birch cordwood. On the way home, with the back-rest stepped in, the peasant and his wife turn their sled into a travelling bed on which they can lie in the hay, with a red comforter over their fur-clad

forms, and sleep and dose as the patient horse trudges back the twenty or thirty miles to their lonely village.

The peasants walked about among the sleds now. They were offering a square metre of sweet birch cordwood for 14s. 6d., and many of them had come twenty-five miles through the night to sell that supply. Others, with their sleds almost lost under scented piles of hay, were offering this at 2s. 6d. a pood (36 pounds). They were clustered in knots, talking steadily, and except for their headgear it would be impossible to tell the men and women apart. Huge, clumsy figures, wrapped in rough-tanned sheepskin coats, their feet heavy in clumping woollen boots; the men wore fur caps and the women were heavily hooded in grey shawls; as rough and muddy looking as their furry horses, before each of which was an impressive pile of hay. The peasants were sad this morning because bread—their king and staff of life—was selling for 13 roubles a pood. Five times its correct price. But even under that black cloud their native shrewdness and satire was ever at their hand.

"Pojolst!" danced one, prancing around in his utter rags, when he saw my camera—"Please take a photograph of the cultured peasant."

His companions rocked with heavy laughter, delighted with his gibes at "culture," the password of the proletariat—although one or two of the women did whimper a little as they began to lament to me about bread.

I have followed many fairs: in Donegal, in the Balkans, in Spain, and with their hurdy-gurdies and toy theatres they always seem to me a glamorous episode of peasant life, a crude version of the town and its de-

lights laid out for their special benefit. Booths instead of shops; side-shows in lieu of theatres (with always the pub. at hand), a few hours, even days, of spending and companionship, gossip and drink—and then back to the land again.

And, although the temperature was about 15° below zero, this Russian fair was no exception. Later on in the day, about eight o'clock, the wooden booths threw open their flaps and displayed fantastic counters of chinaware, painted toys, tins of fruit, cakes, candies, harness, hardware, lamps, paintings, pottery, clothes, silk scarfs—all waiting for the peasants' money. There were games of chance which raffled off everything from a samovar to a box of biscuits; waffle counters, where the fat proprietor made crisp waffles on an oil-stove before your hungry eyes and rolled them around a luscious stuffing of whipped cream; there was another game where you snapped a ball around a board set with nails and pockets and if it dropped into the right one you got a rouble—although it never seemed to drop. Electric-shock machines where you grasped two brass cylinders—and jumped when they turned the crank.

There was a merry-go-round! Fifteen below zero, noses freezing, its orchestra playing furiously as a man swung the wooden horses around and around by hand. One man played the drums and cymbals, two others dragged the cavalry march of the Red army from wailing accordions. . . . And—wonder of all wonders!—a great wheel! It was forty feet high, a rotating circumference of green boxes, swinging up and around, with two peasants in each box, some of them howling their delight, but most of them looking anxiously at the two

boys who, seizing the bars, swung them shivering upward to the sky.

There were two theatres. Tents, walled in by boards —like Alaskan saloons—with gorgeous painted sign-boards across their tops; dancing men in funny hats; and clowns, furiously agile men in spangled tights who spun barrels with their feet, balanced chairs on their chins, and jumped over backwards—always miraculously landing on their feet.

"Hi! Hello, Ivan Simeonivitch! Have a drink?"

Vodka bottles began to make their appearance on the glassy snow of the fair grounds. The peasant mass began to stagger a bit. They drove wildly, recklessly, as if blind, through the crowded streets of the town—knotted themselves in bunches beneath the pink walls of the kremlin, shook hands on drunken bargains under the blue, golden-starred domes. . . . The women were either sobbing, a bit stupefied to find their man drunk or else their harsh high laughter rang out with the rest of the clatter of yells, rushing sled-runners, and mangled music from the accordions. . . .

And through it all they crowded into the low steaming rooms of the Red Hotel stolovia. They ate sliced salt herring garnished with cold onions, beet and cabbage; they pulled their own bread from their blouses, ate sausage cut up into chunks from the family plate—each taking a turn to spear a piece—putting down the fork between-times to show they were not greedy. Bearded faces like those of the Apostles, shawl-hooded madonnas. All of them at the very threshold of a new life under the Soviets—what a vast, untouched wealth they represented in the storehouse of mankind!

CHAPTER XXIX

PROLETARIANISING THE PEASANT

UNTIL quite recently the theory has been held, and even vigorously fought for by the Right Wing within the Communist party, that it was necessary for the salvation of Soviet Russia to allow the peasant more chance for individual growth in the development of his land. Even as late as last spring the Politburo was almost split in two over it—Rykov, Bukharin, Voroshilov, even Kalinin, said to have been bitterly lined up against Stalin. Rykov and Bukharin were censured and stripped of power by the Communist party congress last November as a consequence. Unquestionably this theory is still held in secret by many of the most prominent Bolsheviks. But during this last year the amazing growth of the Soviet " kolhose," collective farms, seems to have brought a new force to bear on the " peasant problem " which promises an entirely different solution. Instead of developing as an individual the peasant becomes insignificant as a member of a rapidly expanding " kolhose "; his control over his own parcel of land and agricultural inventory becomes less and less until it is practically nil; and, if the collectivist evolution is carried out to the ultimate step, he will end as a hired hand of the State—a member of the land proletariat.

Stalin will have been right.

But that the peasants could have been induced to embark on any such scheme which entailed the giving up of the ownership over their own land is something almost unbelievable. The " psychological resistance " of the peasant has been the greatest problem and the principal force which threatened to wreck the Soviet Government. The peasants were petty bourgeoisie with an irreconcilable belief in private property. The " Kulaks " would fight the Soviet power until they either destroyed it or were destroyed. For eleven years the Russian Press has been gory with " Kulak " outrages—murders, arson, cattle-maiming, shooting of electioneering Young Communists, village uprisings and executions. The Press, last harvest season (1929), was full of Soviet executions of peasants who opposed the " collectives "; the wholesale exodus of the Mennonites and the 15,000 German colonists who tried to leave Russia. These things still continue, but in many places where " kolhoses " have been formed even the Kulaks have become members. What worked this miracle?

Force, is one answer. But not the whole of it. Desperation is another answer, and unquestionably plays the major part in it. Seduction is another—the temptation of being able to secure Government credits. And, in addition, the collective farm itself has many obvious virtues of its own to recommend it.

The collective farms were first started on the confiscated large estates of former landowners. In many instances farming had already been carried out there on the grand scale. These were worked by proletarians and hired farmhands. During the period of militant

Communism some small quantity of collectives were formed as artels and communes. But these produced practically nothing for market. The New Economic Policy from 1921 to 1927 began to change this growth radically. " Companies " began to be started, small groups of peasants, clubbing together to buy and work agricultural machinery, ultimately pooling their lands. They began to produce for market. The collectives, which up to now had been almost invariably started by the poorest peasantry, began to be joined by the main mass of the middle peasants. Formerly it was on the estates of ex-landlords; now the richer peasants began to throw in their lands. From 1921 to 1927 20,000 collectives were organised, over half of which were " companies."

Nineteen twenty-seven began a new period. At this date, so the Russian statisticians assure us (but I believe they are somewhat optimistic), the area under cultivation and the cattle had reached pre-war levels. Home industry began to produce a certain amount of agricultural machinery. The growth of the collectives began to assume strong proportions, 20,000 in 1927, 60,000 in 1929. They averaged ninety hectares (225 acres) each. There were more than 200 collectives of over 5,000 acres each. And this last figure does not include the rich Ukraine, where in 1929 there were 3,000,000 acres in collectives, over 500,000 of which were in big farms. The figures for June 1st, 1929, showed there were 900,000 peasant families enrolled in collectives consisting of over 4,000,000 people. They were cultivating 11,000,000 acres.

The collective movement was closely allied with the

co-operatives, out of which the "kolhose" was a logical growth. The village co-operative, first used for supply, began in 1927 to be used for organising production. The co-operatives were the social and economic force which achieved this. Collectivism grew out of co-operation. For example: A co-operative credit society makes a contract with a group of peasants, sometimes a whole village, according to the terms of which the peasants are obliged to sow a certain area of land, carry out a land survey (redistribution for common holding), use the best grade of seeds, and introduce the manifold field system of rotation crops. In return for this the credit society agrees to supply the peasants with agricultural machinery, high quality seeds, pay cost of land survey and furnish an "agronom" (agricultural expert). Therefore, as a result of this contract, a kolhose or collective farm is formed. The collective agrees to sell grain to the co-operative at a fixed price.

These collectives combine to form "bundles" in order to make themselves pay, and the peasant's individual control over his own land becomes more and more insignificant. In the small kolhose he still has some say about it, voting at the election of the president and board of five members, elected by the local peasant assemblage. His voice is heard in the collective meetings when they decide on what wages or drawing account they are going to pay themselves. But when the kolhoses begin to combine and village after village becomes merged, he is voting for men whom he very likely has neither seen nor heard of—and more than likely they aren't peasants at all. As

the kolhoses increase in size they become more and more controlled by experts—people sent out from Moscow—the envoys of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Perhaps the chief reason for the apparently widespread change of peasant "psychological resistance" and his willingness to throw his land and chattels in with the collectives is the fact that he is desperate. The whole policy of the present Soviet Government seems to have been intended to pulverise the village mass, to break the "hard lumps" of kulaks, and prevent the middle-class peasant from getting richer, in order to make them amenable to collectivisation. The taxation introduced last autumn where the "individual" or income tax was introduced (a hypothetical income assessed and assigned by the local Soviet), was an admirably constructed instrument to achieve this effect. Here, when a peasant began to own more than one horse, a cow, perhaps a mill, he was penalised. The direct result was that the peasant gave up his horses and live stock, keeping barely enough to cultivate his land—and not even enough for that in most cases. I have had peasants this year take me to their stables and show me the one horse—which had collapsed trying to take in the wheat. A bumper crop was out in the field, but the peasant and his family couldn't harvest it. "They just don't want us to get rich," was their desperate complaint. And the other force acting upon the peasant was the fact that he was assessed a certain stipulated amount of grain which he must deliver over to the State at the State's fixed price. In many cases this was even more than he had,

whereupon he was accused of hoarding—and sold out. The result was, that with not enough live stock to cultivate his land and the sword always hanging over him, as he had to supply a certain fixed amount of grain to the State at the end of the year, even the most bitterly reactionary old peasant began to look for a way out in the extended credits, agricultural machinery and the assurance of safety from being attacked as an individual held out by the State in the form of a local collective farm. And if he didn't, the poor peasants, forming a local collective around him, would soon squeeze him into it. He would be isolated, cut off from purchasing his supplies at the local co-operative; his land—if it stood in the way of the collective—would be taken away from him (he supposedly being given an equal area of land somewhere else), and he would make himself a conspicuous target for all the " administrative " measures adopted towards these unhappy peasants who set themselves against the Government. For these reasons you even see Kulaks trying to get into the local collectives. I have seen one letter where a Kulak begged the local collective to admit him, taking over his mill, horses, land and all.

The poor peasants play a great rôle in the formation of these collectives. Forming as they do the overwhelming proportion in any village, destitute and desperate, they are usually eager to accept any form of Government help and credits that promise to put them on their feet. In one tractor-squadron district I was on, where 251 farms had formed a collective, there were 180 poor peasant families, 50 middle peasants, 14 rich peasants and 4 Kulaks. The filling station and

storehouse for the squadron was in the confiscated home of another Kulak. He had previously owned ten hectares of land, out of which he had only cultivated eight, thus coming within the law that he was not properly working his entire holding guilty of agricultural sabotage—and therefore he was dispossessed. When I asked if he was recompensed for the loss of his buildings and if he was given another ten hectares somewhere else that didn't interfere with the collective, some of the peasants said "Yes" and others said "No." They also said that they were going to kick out the four Kulaks they then had in the collective.

At another night meeting I attended out on the steppe, where some local collectives were then in the process of amalgamating—forming "bundles"—there was a Kulak member who was bold enough to make some minor objections. But the man with whom I was travelling was the head of the "Collective Department" in Moscow, and when he rose, previously unannounced, to speak, and in fierce oratory told the collectives that they shouldn't take in the Kulaks "as the Kulaks will only scheme to destroy you"—this man's face became a death-mask.

And the collective movement, if it succeeds, is really the death-warrant for the Kulak.

CHAPTER XXX

A COLLECTIVE FARM

THE Kriushansky kolhose, or collective farm, lies on the edge of that incredible Russian steppe that stretches for a thousand miles from the River Don into Turkestan. It covers 3,400 hectares, and is made up of 250 farms and 1,070 peasants. As a village of individuals it sowed 500 hectares; as a collective it now sows 1,750 hectares. As individuals the peasants gave the grain elevator about 10 per cent. of their crop; as a collective they will give 75 per cent. The Kriushansky collective farm has sixteen tractors supplied by the " Bread-Centre " at Moscow on credit, also four separate thrashing machine stations of five machines each. The collective was started in August, 1928.

This is a " Tavarishy " kolhose, or company, where the peasants still own their own individual homes, poultry and perhaps a milk cow and pig each; but all of their agricultural inventory, including working cattle—as well as the land—is held in common. Each member of the collective shares in the profits depending upon the number of days worked in a year. The total net income is divided by the total number of working days; the individual's number of days worked are paid for at the above daily rate. There are six categories of work paid for in a graduated scale of rates; an individual being

paid according to the number of days he worked in each category. Sometimes he might have worked in all six. As far as possible the women are expected to share equally in all profits with the men. When a boy or girl reaches the age of eighteen he or she also becomes entitled to an adult's share. During the year's work, before actual profit or loss is ascertained, the individual is paid by the collective a daily wage of from 70-75 kopecks—mostly in kind.

A plan for work is made for the whole year by the " agronom," the agricultural expert. According to the plan the village is divided into groups under group leaders, and the work is accordingly proportioned. Leaders of the groups are in constant daily touch with the BOARD, consisting of five members elected by a village meeting. The Kulak (rich peasant or one paying the " individual " or income tax), has no " voice," no vote in these village meetings. In this village there were two Kulaks, but they had given their entire inventory to the collective. One gave among other things two horses, some agricultural machinery—and his grain mill. Here is his letter, asking to be admitted into the kolhose:

" I herewith ask the BOARD of the kolhose to admit into its capital all my belongings; one mill, two horses," etc., etc.

He gave these without payment.

To look at, Kriushansky was just another one of those remote, lost-to-the-world Russian villages, sprawled along some willows that grew like hair in the rut of a slow stream crawling across the barren, burning and desolate steppe. The steppe knows no fences. The

golden wheat, blazing under the hot sun, stretched off to the unbroken skyline. In places where a collective was not formed and the peasants still cultivated their land on their little individual holdings the wheat sheaves were still piled in little individual ricks, waiting to be taken in to their separate villages and thrashed by hand and flail. On the collective land the sheaves were going across the steppes in great caravans of carts towards the monumental ricks beside the American thrashing machines, spewing their golden chaff, served by scores of laughing peasant girls, men and women; working, eating, sleeping in little burlap tents under the great blue bowl of Russian sky. Red workers, harvesting the growing gold of the U.S.S.R.—it was an inspiring spectacle.

We drove out: the agronoms, the Collective Commissar, two Germans and I, from the little provincial town of Balishoff in American motor-cars. We drove along dust-deep roads through drowsy villages, across sun-baked steppe where the hot air whirled dust-spirals towering as water-spouts across the cracked earth. A sudden amazing and soothing greenness—willows and rushes beside slow moving water—and Russian women, naked as Eve, washing their babies and clothes in the stream. . . .

We found tragedy on the way: a village of desperate "individual" peasants. One of them, cultivating a $3\frac{1}{2}$ hectare farm, told us—the Germans and myself—that last year he grew 80 poods of grain, out of which the Government had made him give up 60 at the Government price of 1.30 roubles per pood. Out of the surplus left him he could not even buy one pair of boots—

30 roubles. It took 40 poods of rye to buy a pair of boots—that was the way he phrased it to us. Last year he paid a tax of 7 roubles; this year he will have to pay 10—and subscribe another 20 to the " Industrialisation loan." He had one horse, too tired to collect this year's harvest—a bumper crop. The horse (and it was a good one) had collapsed. He was working in company with several other peasants who had had the same experience. They all complained that they were not able to go on as they were under the present cattle conditions: lack of fodder, excessive taxation. One of them said: " We are not allowed to have cattle. We are not able. To tell the truth, they simply don't want us to get rich. If we have a family of five people, one horse, one cow, one calf—they tax us 10 roubles. Add another horse—20 roubles. If we have three horses they tax us from 40 to 50." One old man said that last year he had been able to work his parcel of land in one day because of the good condition of his cattle; this year, with insufficient feed, cattle weak, it took him five days to cultivate the same area. Last year he had sufficient seed for his land. " This year I have much less and I don't know how much I shall be able to sow; because, if you have seed, everybody knows it—and the Government forces us to give it to them."

Further on we came to a mill, run by an oil engine, grinding wheat. Seven peasants had formed an " artel " to operate it. Each year the Government had tried to charge " individual " tax on the members of this artel. So far they had successfully avoided it—this year they would have to pay. They were giving away their lands in order to escape such a financial punishment. They

told us the story of the man who had previously run the mill. He had nothing but that and his house. But he was receiving 4 pounds out of every pood (36 pounds) of grain he ground for the local peasants. Out of that the Government demanded that he sell it at the fixed rate—" at least half as much grain as the whole village could supply." He couldn't do it; the State sold him out—" and now he runs around like a madman."

Yes, of course they would join a collective—it was the only way out.

Such was the prelude to that crowded collective committee room in the dispossessed Kulak's house at Kriushansky. Despair and desperation. But in the collective rooms there was hope, a bit too optimistic perhaps, but an onward and upward thrust. We were aware that in the background lurked some pessimists who would have liked to come out openly and criticise—but not before the big collective directors from Moscow. We were sure we would find countless examples of poor organisation and management on their common farm —mishandling, overmanned tractors and harvesters—but then they had to learn how to use such things. The thrashing machine, even mismanaged, is a more hopeful sight than peasants using back-breaking flails. The faces of the peasants were eager.

And as I looked at them I thought of an old, old peasant, the village idiot perhaps, we had talked with on the road. Asked why he didn't want to enter a collective, he replied in the vocabulary of Red Russia:

" I prefer to remain autonomous."

Yes, unquestionably he was a fool.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE "RED LIGHTHOUSE": A FARMING COMMUNE

IN those civil and sanguinary wars that ravaged Russia after the October revolution a group of hard-riding Cossacks attached themselves to the Red general, Budenny, and helped drive out the armies of the Poles and Denikin. Then, their vocation as professional killers abolished by the Soviets, these old janissaries of Tzarist days looked about for a New Life. They found it on the barren steppes they had ranged so freely as children. Grouped about the personality of one of their sergeants, a thinker as well as a fighter, they set up a communal farm. They got a credit from the Government and started a herd of cattle, which got foot-and-mouth disease and promptly died. Some of the Cossacks went off after that and settled down as individual farmers; but fifty-seven of them—the Reddest of the outfit—went off with the sergeant and started all over again. They obtained from the Soviet a grant of land that had not been worked for over ninety years: bare, desolate sun-baked steppe by the flanks of a muddy little river. They lived in tents at first; then built a log-and-mud cabin. They hoisted a flag and called this the "Red Lighthouse."

There it stands today, looking out on the unbroken,

sea-like horizon of the mighty steppe. It has other buildings around it now, a whitewashed communal dining-room, stables, cattle-pens, and tractor sheds. I sat in the communal dining-room and ate cherry jam from their orchard, and I swam with them in their lazy little stream, boys, girls and women, inhabitants of the Red Lighthouse, so gloriously free in their loneliness of the steppe that they had long ago given up the convention of bathing-suits. And one of them as we dried ourselves in the sun told me that another Cossack commune had been started next them—and that was called " Paradise."

I wondered. Anything less idyllic than those wood-and-mud buildings up above us, baking, fly-buzzing under a pitiless sun, would be hard to imagine. Treeless, with no shade. I ate the jam—but I never did see the cherry orchard. It was probably down in some richer land along the river. The clothes that the swimmers were putting on were patched and tattered. The lips of the girls were taut and their eyes had a grim look in them. Yet they grinned sheepishly when I asked them did they like their New Life; lowered their heads, and said, " Of course we do "; and one of their men—the original sergeant—said:

" It may be wrong to say it, but it makes us feel happy when we all sit down together in our dining-room. You see," he added, " we were all very poor."

That was the genesis of this " commune "—a collective battle against poverty. A commune is quite different from those other two collectives: the " Tovarishy " company or artel. In those the peasants pool land which they already own to work it in common, but

retain for their individual selves some of their dairy animals, poultry, and, of course, their homes. In a "commune" everything is held in common—it is 100 per cent. communal. And usually the commune starts with a combination of landless people—they are very poor. Therefore, with tractors working over their growing acres, nice fat cattle in the communal farmyard, a cheery dining-room where they could all chat and hold meetings together—and the communal swimming hole—no wonder those other poor peasants had called their place Paradise.

There were two hundred members of the Red Lighthouse now, and they expected to take in another two hundred the next year. The first communal attempt which failed through the death of the herd through foot-and-mouth disease was in debt to the Government for the 20,000 roubles loaned them to purchase their animals. The second commune, the Red Lighthouse, had taken this debt on; but they were paying this off and now reckon themselves to be worth, in cultivated land and agricultural inventory, over 200,000 roubles. They cultivate 700 hectares of steppe, and last year sold 12,000 poods of grain to the elevators, keeping 5,000 for themselves for food and seed. From meat down the Red Lighthouse produces practically all that it eats—sugar, coffee, tea and salt being practically the only outside purchases. The whole commune eats meat once a day—the children eat four meals daily and can have all the milk they can drink. They eat together, but married couples have rooms to themselves. The children, all except the youngest who stay with their parents, sleep in a communal children's

dormitory. From the age of fourteen to eighteen they work as semi-adult members of the commune. After, they become full members. Eighteen is the legal age for marriage in the Soviet Union, and there had been four marriages during the last year, four babies born, and two legal abortions.

These communes, of course, have to make their own rules of life. The splendid isolation of the steppe gives them an excellent opportunity to do this. Some of the wildest theories of Communism are put into practice almost at once. The Red Lighthouse, for example, believing that everything they had belonged to each and all of them, made it the rule that any member could go to their communal storehouse and take out shoes, food, cloth, according to his or her actual needs. But this apparently did not work; a new rule is that each person is entitled to draw one rouble a day—against his share in the yearly division of profits—with which he can pay for what he needs at the store. Each member is supposed to work a ten-hour day, and women are supposed to share equally in the profits with the men. Specialist workers, such as tractorists, mechanics and the agricultural expert, are paid accordingly. Experience has shown that a first-class tractor driver deserves, and should be paid, more than an ordinary farmhand.

As a collective commune the Red Lighthouse is allowed to hire farm labourers during the peak of the harvest season, a thing which would label an individual peasant as a Kulak, an exploiter of labour, and put him outside the pale. The commune shows again here that there is no such thing as an equality of labour

or earning power, for it divides such hired help into four categories. The first class of the men get paid 2.25 roubles a day; second class gets 1.38. The first class women get 1.40; second get 1.5. There is a distinction between both skill and sexes. Many people will claim that that proves that the Communism of the Red Lighthouse is failing. It doesn't. The effort is communal, and the award is shared as fairly as these people think it possible. They vote on such a scale of division themselves with the unskilled in the majority. And the difference between what the lowest and highest paid member is enjoying can hardly be enough to permit it to be said he is exploiting the others.

It was among these hired hands that I saw what such a commune could do for the really poor. Two of them were Bez Prizorny, Russia's savage homeless children. They had turned up at a previous harvest, worked, and were now members of the commune. Another was a youth who had just arrived, walking 65 versts from his home, where, he said, there was no work. He was getting 1.38 roubles as a hired labourer. I asked him did he intend to settle down there and become a member of the commune. He said he didn't know.

"He can if he wants to," said the original sergeant. "We need lots of strong people. Last year we sold the elevator 12,000 poods and kept 5,000 for ourselves; this year we will sell 40,000 and keep 8,000 for ourselves—we need more and more people to help us conquer the steppe."

CHAPTER XXXII

STATISTICIANS ON THE STEPPE

SHE achieved the incredible feat of taking three hours to boil our eggs four minutes—but then she served them with her own hands. She gave us cocoa and eggs for dinner and Irish stew and tea for breakfast. But by that time we did not care. She was a Cossack girl, and a pretty one—slender as Niobe and blue-eyed—the school teacher of the Budenny collective farm.

Now the 7,000 hectares of the Budenny lie on sun-blazing steppe so flat and yellow that I was not at all surprised to see a camel swinging across them. They might have been the desert. Only the mountainous straw-ricks at our backs and the sharp stubble before my feet spoke of the season when all this was a sea of green wheat, and of tractors that followed the same furrows for miles and miles. Out on the steppe lay other villages, lost almost in the ravines of their slow-moving streams. This was the country of the famous Don Cossacks.

The pretty school teacher was the sequel to hours, yes, days of motoring across the dry dusty steppe. When we arrived at Budenny we came in three cars. The occupants of the first one still looked to be white; the second car crowd resembled Eurasians and the

third were pure Ethiope. We went to the commune power-house (which had an artificial pond of water beside it on the steppe), and there we stripped and had a miraculous shower-bath from the hot water of its boilers. Then we were escorted to the school-house, where, it was presumed, we would eat and sleep, and there, dressed in an obviously home-made but pretty blue frock, stood this lovely creature with her unafraid Cossack eyes. She stood in the biggest room of her little school for children from four to eight. Beside her were the pegs on which hung their tiny bathing shorts, in which she would parade them all day, and over each peg was its owner's mark. They were paintings of animals—a frog, a lion, pig, duck, tiger, elephant. Little chairs that only came up to our calves lined the wall. And there stood the school teacher, the social hostess for the village, dressed in her best and only satin slippers.

I write about her because she was the spirit of all that was beautiful and eager in this life of the new colonists of the steppe. She was real, and even the statisticians forgot their paper lives for the moment to try and win her regard. I had suffered a lot from statisticians. At 2 a.m. the previous morning, when I was trying to sleep on my folded arms across a railway restaurant table, a comrade had turned up with a portfolio under his arm and graphs and sheets of statistics that were over a yard long. From two until three I was forced to listen politely while he expounded to me how he had made a successful " bundle " of thirteen hitherto unsuccessful collective farms. They were not, he said, economically efficient to stand by

themselves. And then as the dawn broke I asked him one question.

" Tell me," I managed to utter, " how many of the farms were operating at a profit and how many at a loss?"

That, he said, was the one set of figures he did not have. Whereupon I made a few remarks that earned me the reputation of being not only a materialistic but a very rude American bourgeois. So you can see why I smiled when she turned the statisticians down—even the flute-player.

And here I must make a digression to speak of this delightful Russian and his flute. He was a photographer from the newspaper *The Young Communist Truth*. He wore a white linen suit that was cut pyjama pattern. His flute was bamboo and he made it himself. He played opera with it better than most flute-players in the Metropolitan Opera House of New York. He was a genius. He played for us as we lay down to slumber in apple orchards with the ripe fruit dropping on our heads; he played as we sat under the bright stars on the tops of mountainous collective haystacks; he played as we dried ourselves in the moonlight after bathing in the dark sulky steppe streams; and just before we had reached the edge of the wide Budenny he had played for the baby of the wife of the druggist of a little sleepy town while that lady went off in search of her husband to open his little shop. He played like Pan.

But still the pretty school mistress turned him down because, you see, she had those eggs to cook.

There is something infinitely pathetic in the spec-

tacle of kindly, simple people putting their best foot forward to receive what they conceive to be sophisticated and distinguished foreigners in their midst, especially when the aforesaid simple people are pretty girls. The poise of the school teacher was highly laudable. She did not apologise for just giving us eggs. She merely put them before us with a smile, her slender arms reaching over our shoulders. And to cover our dismay—for during that three hours' wait we had been expecting at least a banquet—the flute-player jazzed Chopin's " Funeral March."

But we got our revenge, for when the statisticians got going again, encouraged by semi-starvation to incredible intricacies of tabulated figures and fancy, she was by politeness forced to sit there and listen, wide-eyed, with her pretty chin sunk thoughtfully in her cupped hands.

When it came to sleep, the two Germans and I, who had not slept under cover for something like eight days, looked about for our usual bunk—a communal hayrick. But the only one we found was too round to climb; so we each took two of the tiny children's canvas cots that the school teacher offered us. We took them outside, and we placed them so that the hayrick stood between us and the moon, hoping that there were no camels about to nibble our hair. The school teacher's light burned for a few minutes in her room—and then the vast steppe was quiet.

I was lying there, thinking of her life, bringing up these new and sturdy little colonists of the steppe—how she had chased a covey of them that had come in to stare at us into a corner where they stared at us from

behind her skirts. And just at that moment, without thinking, I put my elbow on one of the tiny cots and tried to turn. It was all that was needed to demolish them both. There was a rip of agonised canvas, a crash and splintering of sticks, and I lay among the wreckage on the ground. Both of the Germans crashed their cots at almost the same time. We had destroyed the entire sleeping outfit of the Cossack kindergarten.

And that explains (although not to them) the bewildered and accusing stare in the statisticians' bespectacled eyes when, half-way back to Moscow, the Germans and I handed them a little envelope, on which was written:

" For the school of the Budenny collective farm."

CHAPTER XXXIII

YAROSLAVL THE BATTERED

YAROSLAVL, like Kazan and Nijni-Novgorod, is another of those glorious golden-crowned Volga cities whose names are set with swords in the walls of Russian history. Founded in 1042 by Yaroslav the Wise, sacked by the Tartars in 1238, rising to its full glory in the seventeenth century, its latest escapade was to figure as the centre of what was probably the fiercest fighting of the Russian civil war. For sixteen days in 1918 a last stand of desperate white officers, armed with English machine-guns, shot it out with hordes of Red revolutionaries, armed with artillery, during which they destroyed over two thousand houses, five thousand men —there is hardly a wall in all Yaroslav not ploughed by their bullets—and they left what is unquestionably the most romantic skyline in all the Soviet Union.

This skyline is the battered church domes of old Yaroslav. And what churches! Churches of enamel and mosaic, bulbous domes of gold, barbaric pyramids —no two alike—all roaring with colour. Clusters of golden crosses. Deep-sounding bulging domes sitting flat on high arches with little sharp domes on tall towers rising like chimes all around them. The famous outrageous churches of the Yaroslav school, built to the glory of God and the Tzars—on the slavery of the

peasants—brazen their ornamentation, the frescoes that adorn every inch except the iron floor of their ornate and bewildering interiors. Their walls heavy with gold and silver crowned ikons, these flaunting structures were reared when the Church was a mouthpiece of officialdom, an instrument of police and oppression, and the gentlemen organised slave-hunts for their escaped peasantry in the same way that people hunt deer.

The brazen churches of the Yaroslav school—there is something tremendous in the thought that these particular old Tzarist officers, the end of their line, should have made their last and most bitter fight in these insolent creations which their line had reared, and by which that line had been upheld, and that, in the end, they should have fallen down from their machine-guns, dropping from the crazy cupolas, past the painted walls, to crash on the iron floors before the upraised hands of Peter and Paul and Elijah—even as the dead crow I found on the snow-drifted floor of Nicolas the Wet.

A shell of some heavy calibre had knocked off the massive fish-scaled cupola of Nicholas the Wet. I climbed into the church through dark corridors, still filled with sand-bags. I crawled among them and under them and at last stood inside the painted walls, lighted now by the rents up aloft; and there, wherever I stared, I saw fantastic life-sized scenes from the Bible—the Holy Ghost, as a wooden dove, lay on its back beside the dead crow.

In the church of Peter and Paul on the Volga I climbed through an entanglement of shattered iron and came on a church floor piled with bird droppings, guana a foot deep like that on the islands off Peru. I found

ikons stacked up like firewood. The grey-hooded crows stared down insolently from the twisted iron-work of a shattered cupola overhead.

In the church of the Nativity—which I found on fire when I got there—I waded through the smoke and found the old archives, bibles from 1682, the time of Peter and Ivan, with their two names side by side in the mouldy, worm-eaten books. A soft silt of snow was ceaselessly falling down on them. In a chapel I found a pile of priests' vestments—surplices, tattered silk, gold bedecked robes, heavy with crosses—all piled in a heap. I fished through it, turned them over, flowered patterns of rose. . . .

In one church, where the guns of the Reds had conveniently shot all the cupolas away, I found a club.

In the monastery of Our Saviour, dating from the twelfth century, within whose long fort-like walls the Whites put up their best fight, I found the church of the Transfiguration entirely transfigured. Half of it had been shot away. And inside what was left I found a carpenter's shop, the iron floors knee-deep in wood shavings and peasant workmen sawing and planing away under Soviet slogans pasted across the frescoes of Rykov and Tomsky. A blacksmith had a forge going beside the sea of Galilee. . . .

And here I saw the flood-tide in this ebb of destruction, for these peasant workmen—under the direction of the Commissariat of Education—are rebuilding these battered churches. Inside the monastery of Our Saviour is a workshop where architects are supervising the restoration. Using old materials as much as possible, they are replacing stone on stone to the original likeness.

I saw earnest architects poring over their photos and blue prints and skilled masters carefully restoring the old ikons. They have already rebuilt the fantastic tower of old Nicholas the Wet, who, by the way, should be the patron saint of all good Americans. They have put back most of the cupolas of the battered Peter and Paul. And they keep under locked guard the precious church of Elijah the Prophet.

This dove-coloured structure, so plain externally, and so outrageously ornate once you get in it, was saved from much destruction by reason of its position in the very heart of Yaroslavl. The ever-present crows eyed me from the pine-trees as I entered its glass and iron gates. They were the note of its desolate exterior. Inside I stood amidst a blaze of colours—vivid blues and yellows and reds—every inch of its tall walls and two massive pillars being painted with life-size scenes from the life of Elijah, the figures in costumes against the castellated scenery of the seventeenth century. A wedding party sat at the table in the actual Russian style—with Russian cakes before them. Terrific scenes of wheat fields and journeys and battles. . . . They dazzled me. The very walls seemed to flame with the crude colours of the stiff figures. A terrific example, perhaps, of the vulgar taste of Tzar Alexis's boyars—whose artists used the contemporary art of all Europe as a fish-pond for their fancies—but nevertheless the most perfect example existent of the seventeenth-century Yaroslavl school.

And so, at sundown, I walked out on the middle of the frozen river and looked back. The Volga ice is a half-mile across at this point. And as you look back to the high cliffs, all you can see of Yaroslavl is the

seventeenth century—the same skyline that met the eyes of Peter the Great.

I stared at it until the sun set, leaving it just a jagged silhouette along whose topless towers and toppling domes I could see where the twentieth century had shot most of the seventeenth away.

CHAPTER XXXIV

NIJNI-NOVGOROD

THE church domes of Nijni-Novgorod still shine beside the Volga like golden helmets in the sun—but the face under them has changed.

Nijni began to change its face during the war when the Old Régime, fleeing from the Germans, transported its factories and its artisans from Warsaw, Reval and Riga, its Poles, Letts, Esthonians, and set them down here, some 300 miles east of Moscow, far from the Occident, where the Oka joins the Volga, and two railways meet. They would be safe here, so it seemed, in the heart of old Tzarist Russia. Then came the Revolution. And Nijni, changing face, set in to become a centre of continental industry—instead of living for its Great Fair.

The Great Nijni Fair was probably the most colourful commercial centre in the world. It had 8,000 booths. Merchants flocked to it from all Russia, Asia, the Far East. It sold everything. Things were not sold from samples; the merchants brought their goods with them. Millions of roublesworth of rugs, jade and silk, stored in the big red warehouses by the river, had started on the backs of camels back in China. For two months every year, from July 28th to September 23rd, that low triangle of land between the Volga and the Oka almost sank under the wealth of its goods.

But the World War interrupted the Great Fair which had been going on for 100 years; the aftermath of the Russian civil war wrecked most of it (many a new house in Nijni today was built with the red bricks from these famous old booths), and the edicts of the Soviet against private trading have practically sounded its death-knell. The Bolsheviks have no use for such old-fashioned affairs. Private trade is doomed. The fair's gaunt frame still holds some life, a few merchants still collect there; but the Persians no longer bring their fine rugs (not for the proletariat), they bring raisins instead—and the Great Fair is dead.

Sitting in the wooded park inside Nijni's crumbling kremlin walls, with the Fair gone, you feel as if a dead city lay behind you. A new one, you know, is taking its place. But that hasn't arrived yet, and it will be a long, long time before Nijni will achieve any industrial magnitude, any liveliness that will compensate—if it ever can—for the colour and romance that was Nijni's before it lost the Great Fair. At the present moment its streets are drab and dreary. Its shops, Communist or otherwise, are catering for a taste that is not very particular and which rejoices in most things that it finds because they are distinctly better than it was accustomed to. Its cafés cater to people who do not mind dirty cutlery and soup stains on the walls. Its hotels are little better than barns. Its book-stores—and there you find the Great Exception—its book-stores are excellent. Better than they have ever been, for the proletariat is more hungry for knowledge than it is for cakes, or even bread.

Sit on one of the old wooden benches in the kremlin

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park and gaze down on the Volga. It wanders towards you, a brown wind-ruffled flood crawling out of a low marshy plain. A misty horizon, so flat and uneventful that if you stare at it for a long time you begin to think you are looking at water. White churches, dots of white in the far distance, stand up like chalk toys. Directly below you sweeps the river, for Nijni lies on a high red sandstone bluff, old Mother Volga, about 500 yards wide, as you see it in the autumn, and thirteen miles—all the way across to these churches—in the spring. And beyond those far churches, in the dense pine forests that stretch to the unknown north, was recently one of the strangest empires of all history.

This was founded during the Red and White wars, when some Junkers, fleeing from Nijni, took refuge in the forests. They killed the eighteen or twenty revolutionary agents sent out among them. They set up an independent empire of their own. They called it the "Uren Tzarestvo." They elected a Tzar of their own. They were some forty miles from a railroad, lost in a forest so impenetrable that it was said that not even the wolves were dangerous to people who travelled there—because nobody did travel there. But the Cheka sent out an expedition of soldiers to avenge the death of their Red comrades, and that ended the Tzarist Empire of the Swamps.

"It was a mad idea!" said a Nijni-Novgorod Communist, telling me the story. "Mad—to try and hold out like that against all of Russia!"

This Young Communist was typical of the new Russians who will make the new Nijni. He was in his early thirties; he spoke English, French and German; he was

one of the editors of the local newspaper; he was a school teacher; he was a prosecuting attorney for major offences against the State, and—he was an atheist. He was limited by the laws of his Party to a maximum salary as editor to 225 roubles a month (£22). He contradicted my assertion that the Americans were truly patriotic during the Revolution and Civil War by asking me had I read Woodward's " Washington " and Meyer's " History of American Millionaires." And he added that while the Communists were materialists it did not mean that they hankered after worldly goods; they had faith in their ideals of what was right and wrong—a faith that recently was strong enough to send fifteen young Nijni Communists to a voluntary exile in Siberia, merely because the Party thought they should go out there to work among the peasants.

I had this amazing young man in mind when I sat on that old wooden bench looking down on the Volga. Behind me, in a neglected grove, was a dead church. Its windows were broken, some were boarded up; a worker's family lived in its chapel. But the sacred tableau stood untouched inside, women looking down upon Christ, figures no more stiff than those of the peasant women staring at them through the barred door. That was the old faith—and the breeze that blew from that church brought no incense.

Below, along the water-front, lay the vast red cubes of some modern warehouses. From among them came the incessant clatter of iron-shod carts jolting along the cobbled streets. The din of the water-front came up to me: cries of fish-sellers, the grain stalls, the endless snakes of stevedores unloading barges.

I looked down on all this over a haze of obsolete church domes. The wind that ruffled the Volga swept past long grey passenger liners, black paddle-wheel towing-steamers, grey wood barges, red petroleum tankers, some of the Soviet's 2,000 ships that ply between Nijni-Novgorod and the Caspian—ships going down along the backbone of Russia. They flew the Red flag at their mastheads.

But behind me was something even more remarkable in this changing Nijni-Novgorod—the masts of the biggest wireless experimental station in the world, the revolutionary 16,000 volts high-tension mercury rectifiers, and 100 kilowatt Bonch-Bronovich lamps. A wireless station that had installed a beam system in 1926—before Marconi. A station that with short waves had sent energy across the Volga, and lighted lamps on that far marshy shore—that shore which only a few years before had seen the death of the Tzarist Empire of the Swamps.

I wondered if there was not something significant in such a fact.

CHAPTER XXXV

ROSTOFF

IN a country where the worker is supreme the condition of a railway-carriage naturally depends upon the temperament of the porter in charge, and we were grateful, therefore, to the provodnik of our Moscow-Rostoff "hard." It was the cleanest third-class sleeping-car I have ever been in.

By accident (you may be sure it was no wish of mine) we got our place in the non-smokers' section. These are always the cleaner because there is less spitting going on—and the Russians are bad marksmen. Also, as the train started from Moscow, we got in with the first; and when the "hard" began to heat up and smell—we warmed up and smelt with them. You don't notice it so much if you start even.

My wife took the lower sleeping-shelf and spread out her fur coat on the hard board, using her travelling-rug as a pillow. I climbed into the upper shelf, using my overcoat as a bed and our hard little suit-case as my pillow, my feet sticking out in the aisle. I know how the Japs must feel who sleep on wooden blocks. The other two passengers in our cubicle were a young man and girl. They were either sweethearts or freshly married. They reversed our performance, she taking the upper shelf and he the lower. He produced a tiny

white pillow from his bag which he tucked under her curly head. She slept in her fur coat, probably for fear that someone might steal it—although no one ever undresses in a " hard."

They were somewhere around the kingdom of marriage; either just married, about to be, or living without that bourgeois shackle. At any rate, I heard him making love to her at four in the morning. He was standing up, with his arms on her sleeping-shelf, his face almost touching hers—I am sure it did when my back was turned—and she was answering his low earnest mumbling with little no's and yes's and perhaps's—like the contented mewing of some drowsy animal.

It was a very interesting performance, because romantic love is out of date in the proletarian State. In the first place, the congested housing conditions are against it—there is no place to make love in—and in the second, love *per se* is contrary to the Soviet ideology. It is bourgeois to make love, to whisper of romance and paw each other about; sex should be normal and impulsive—like it is with the animals. I reflected as I watched this performance through half-shut eyes that I had not seen one love scene in six months' steady theatre-going in Soviet Russia—not once had I felt its wings brush my face. So I turned my back on this pair and let them get on with it. . . .

Rostoff lay ahead of me—Rostoff, with its constellation of church domes, like the burst of a rocket at the end of this long line through the black night from Moscow. Another one of those isolated ancient Russian cities which, rocket-like, had flamed in the skies of

history—and then gone out. Today it is almost forgotten, just the market centre for a large peasant region, its perfect church domes and pink kremlin lying on the shores of Lake Nero. Rostoff, in many ways, is a relic. At least, I thought of it as such that dawn as I watched the forests lighten, the white snows and dark pine-trees slipping by. I did not know that, around Rostoff and Borisoglybsky, I would see strong men weeping and have old women try to kiss my hand. . . .

We reached Rostoff at five, too early to try our hotel, so we sat in the station waiting-room and drank tea. This was in the first and second class buffet, full of sheepskin-clad peasantry; men and women belted round the middle, with the sheep's fur worn inside their yellow-tanned pleated coats. There were some workers and their families waiting to catch the six o'clock Moscow train, a soldier with his wife and baby. The old and most drunken of the peasants lay sprawling on the dirty tiled floor; they snored along the walls, among the linoleum-covered tables, and the children played among them. Strange infants, miniatures of their parents, the peasants' children were dressed in tiny pleated sheepskin coats, trimmed with fur along the edges, and wore fat felt boots. They had little fur caps, with the ear flaps and forehead flap turned up—so that they looked like tiny frontiersmen. In America, France or England children so small would have been in prams or sitting on their mother's knee, but here in Russia they seemed almost animals in their early ability to get about, to fend for themselves; bright, beady-eyed, tottering about among the bearded, heavy-breathing figures on the floor, bumping into each other

—so fat and wobbly that it seemed as if nothing but the broad soles of their fat little felt boots were keeping them upright. . . . And watching them, and the way their doting parents fondled them, made one resentful of the puerile falsehoods so widespread in the foreign newspapers about how the State was taking the children away from their mothers. In all the sorrow of Soviet Russia the children—especially those of the workers—are sheltered and fondled in a tiny world of make-believe that sometimes approaches a veritable children's paradise.

It was snowing outside, a dark grey morning, with the soft flakes blotting everything out beyond a few hundred feet. The eastern domes of the kremlin were bleak silhouettes in the wintry sky. Outside the windy station we discovered a bright lemon-coloured sled hitched to a fat white horse. The sled was shaped like a triangle with its point to the horse, with a ridge across its broad part for us to rest our backs and its bottom filled with soft hay. On this stood a little hunchbacked driver, with that mystic stare that all natal cripples have in their eyes. We got in; the white horse flung up his heels—he had no gait at all—and we flew along the serrated road to Rostoff. The road was cut into a ladder of ridges by the plodding step of hundreds and hundreds of peasants' horses. We passed a continuous line of their sleds going into town—sleds loaded with hay, straw and cordwood to be sold in the market.

We swept into the low broad streets that radiate outward from the pink walls of the ancient kremlin, dashed below its painted domes, past piles of wooden

wheels, sled-runners and iron bars. " Whoop! *Bere-geeze!*" shouted our little hunchback, sending peasants flying like pigeons, and pulled up with a long skid before our hotel. It was low, two-storied like the rest of the buildings in old Rostoff, and its plaster walls were painted a bright raspberry-red, a reason, perhaps, why they called it the " Red Hotel," although its old name, the " Rostoff," was still written on its walls.

We climbed up a dark flight of wooden stairs, faced a man behind the glass door, who examined us carefully and then let us in. We were given a room whose ceiling was so low that I reached up and touched it, whose two windows, double-paned, were so close to the floor that we had to bend down to look out of them. On its ancient wallpaper some long-forgotten artist had painted a primitive locomotive puffing through a pine forest. The little man-of-all-work stuffed some birch logs into our tiled stove.

" Today is the yarmock," he told us. " The beginning of Rostoff's yearly fair." And peering out of our windows we saw the peasants gathering—a great dark mass; hundreds of carts and horses, forming in long lines, like streets, on the edge of the town. We could hear them crowding into the steamy dining-room down below. Two thousand peasants from the forests and plains—the life-blood of old Rostoff under the Soviets.

CHAPTER XXXVI

TRAVELLING "HARD"

APART from the *wagons-lits*, in which only foreigners, Nepmen and high officials ride, there are two kinds of railway-carriages in Soviet Russia—"zhostky" and "myakhky" (hard and soft). You can travel in the *wagons-lits* if you are that sort of person, but if you really want to get down to bed-rock, you must travel in a "hard." A bed-rock, or rock-bed, whose stoniness may be ameliorated a little by a palliasse, sheets and disinfected blankets, which you can rent from the train-guard, the provodnik, for 5s.

But what of the people? Won't you have to sleep with smelly peasants? Yes, if you are travelling short distances, say merely overnight, you will. Your next shelf-neighbour will very likely be a gentleman in shaggy sheepskins, knee whiskers and a whiff. If you are travelling around Daghestan or the Caucasus he will almost certainly be attired with a very useful-looking dirk. Things vary. Coming up from Vladikavka in the Caucasus to Moscow, a trip of two days and three nights, the man over my head for the first two nights was a Red army officer. He was a fat middle-aged man, slightly bald. He wore an impressive revolver and a field despatch-case strapped to his portly side. He never spoke, but when we reached Rostoff-

on-Don he almost embraced me with his smile. "Home!" he gulped, and vanished from my sight.

A peasant girl came in and took his place. She brought in enough boxes and burlap baggage to fill a truck. There is never any deviation from that—a Russian can bring more assorted luggage into a railway-carriage than any other human on earth.

There is another characteristic almost standardised —the lavatories—although there are degrees of frightfulness even there. You never know your luck. Going down through Daghestan, for instance, after being seasick for eighteen hours in the Caspian Sea in a bunk full of fleas, I thought I would be a plutocrat for the moment and ride "soft." The provodnik of the train was particularly rude to me when I asked for a single compartment, one with only two berths, for my wife and myself. He said he couldn't manufacture such things, the train was crowded, and we would have to take what we could get. But he did know how to use a broom, and the lavatory of his wagon was infinitely better than most of those in Moscow hotels. But still . . . Somerset Maugham said that when the lavatory was introduced into China it destroyed all democracy. Well, when democracy was introduced into Russia it destroyed all the lavatories.

The shadowy interior of a Russian "hard," with the great train rumbling through the night, with strange and often savage faces frozen as if in death, and bodies twisted out of shape, has a touch of horror about it. Souls defenceless in sleep. The Caucasian sleeps with his dagger, the factory stenographer puts her handbag down inside her blouse, the business man uses

his despatch-case for a pillow. It is almost like a morgue, with these grotesque forms stretched out on shelves—the great hairy Slavs of Northern Russia, gaping jaws, and beards, forms motionless under heaps of bed-clothes, with no faces at all. And once, walking back through a "hard," I received quite a shock. I saw what at first might have been a monstrosity, for from the upper section of a blanket-roll protruded the head of an old lady in a night-cap, while from its feet stuck out the four legs of a dog. . . .

This life in a "hard" is true democracy if ever there was such a thing. There is no precedence. You take your place in line to wash your teeth in the morning, and you run with the rest of them to the "kipiatok" (hot tap) to get boiling water for your tea. You eat the roast duck, chicken, melons, bread and things you have brought with you or purchased from the peasant vendors at the stations along the line. Or else you eat when the train halts at the station buffets. Seldom, very seldom, does anyone attempt to establish "class" barriers in a "hard," although I saw it happen once.

It was in a "hard" going south from Tiflis. A train employee, a signalman, reserved some fifteen seats to himself. He had done this by wedging his sectional bamboo line-red across the aisle. He was but a minor employee—with a very high opinion of himself.

"Engineer," he said to me among the crowd of Caucasians, Georgians, Turks, etc., trying to get a seat. "Official."

My wife and I "gate-crashed," however, being foreigners and being interested in seeing what this

person would do next. The others growled, and then, with that terrific complacency of the Russians, they retreated and wedged themselves in elsewhere. All except one old lady, a peasant.

" What are those people doing there?"she demanded, pointing to us. " Am I not human too?"

" These seats are mine," said the pompous little rat. " I give them to whom I like. I am on official business."

" Official business!" snorted the old dame, suddenly kicking the barrier down. "Official business! Well, it's a good thing for you you are—or I'd give you such a clout on the ear!"

" Bravo!" yelled all the Georgians, Turks, etc., most of them bearing knives. " Bravo!"

And we were quite a happy little community after that.

CHAPTER XXXVII

"WINTER IS COMING IN MOSCOW!"

WITH the approach of winter at the North Pole, the Russians begin sealing their railway-carriages down in Asia!

They put felt between the double windows of each sleeping compartment, nail it down with board slats, and then screw the windows tight shut. It makes no difference whether the windows have been washed before being irrevocably glued together for six months or not. It makes no difference if the weather is broiling in Tiflis. It is cold in Moscow, and that is all that counts.

"Winter is coming in Moscow!"

This explanation, given with a philosophic grin, is the only answer to your pleading, arguing and ultimate bellowings for fresh air.

"It is cold in Moscow!"

And you peer out of your dirty windows and see camels plodding across the hot Caucasian steppes.

You revolt. You leap out at the next stop and rush to find the station-master in his little red cap. "What?" Impossible!" The windows have been sealed for the winter. "It is cold in Moscow!"

You go to the police, the dreaded (but sometimes

very useful) G.P.U. They are polite but powerless. Winter is coming in Moscow—and that's that.

You slink back into your stuffy compartment. Your flesh begins to glisten—you sweat—the flies buzz around the oven of your cell. They light on a sausage and large hunk of cheese that a Red soldier is biting in turns. The cheese is beginning to decompose in the heat. It runs—the flies after it.

The other passenger in your cubicle has a baby. He is feeding it with grapes. The baby peels each grape carefully, and then puts it down on the dirty window-flap. Then it eats them. Then it wipes its hands on its shirt. The father collects the pips and skins and puts them in the cuspidor attached to the floor. He adds them to your apple-peelings. The flies zoom in ecstasy. They zoom straight from the cuspidor on to the precious bit of chocolate you have been guarding. . . .

Your eyes hurt. Your skin burns. Children are galloping up and down the hot corridor. You have fought with the provodnik to open the end doors, but some frightened mother has immediately closed them again. The air is cut off. . . .

Through the ghastly window you see monotonous, everlasting sweeps of mud-coloured plains. The peaks of the Caucasus are far down on the horizon. They are white with snow. My God! Mountains of fresh, cool, delicious snow! . . .

Then more sweeps of brown plain, so flat that you can spot a hayrick ten miles off.

The Red soldier is beginning to pack up. He takes his hunk of bread and what is left of the cheese and

sausage, and he wraps them up in a shirt and puts them back in his wooden suit-case. Then he lies down to a well-earned sleep.

The train stops.

Passengers rush out. Some, with kettles, rush to the "kipiatok" (station hot-water tap) to fill their kettles for tea. Most rush to the lines of peasants selling food. They are selling chickens, fresh roasted, for 1s. 3d., ducks for 1s. 8d., sausages, apples, little meat-balls cooked in brown dough, milk in brown stone jugs—skin of boiled scum on the top—eggs, tomatoes, melons, and an awful-looking slab like speckled brawn. These private traders line up outside the station.

The station-bell gives two rings, the train hoots, the passengers race back. The train shakes on again. . . . Beyond "Mineral Water" you pass through the scattered villages of the Terek cossacks. You are excited—cossacks! Their mud or plaster houses are painted and quite clean—on the outside at least. But like all Russian villages they are just houses and mud streets set on a mud plain. . . . Streets of mud full of water-pools and ruts, a collection of hayricks—and then the bare steppe.

The family next to you is eating. At the last station papa went hunting and brought back one of those 1s. 8d. ducks. And now they are tearing it apart.

That family next to you! . . . There are seven of them. Papa, mama, grandmama and four kids. Before they went into it their compartment was a clean board cubicle, bare but inoffensive. Now it is a cave. Blankets and fusty bedding have been spread over the four bunks. Boxes, bales, wicker baskets. The upper

loft, where the luggage is stored, is stuffed full of more bales and boxes and wooden trunks. They have brought all the bags they could get into the train. Bursting suit-cases under the lower seats. Clothes hanging from every projection. The little pull-up flat table by the window is a litter of the debris from six meals. They have just finished a round of tea. Papa is stretched out on one of the upper bunks. Grandma sits by the window-flap munching some moist black bread. Mama is smoking, with one portly cotton-clad leg over another. She is also nibbling at a duck leg. The four children tear at the duck's carcass. They rend it. Bits fall on the floor. There is a smell like a fox's den. . . .

The Red soldier has been very kind to the baby. He has just taken it along to the lavatory. He has obviously washed its face. He lies down flat on his back and puts the baby on his chest. The baby pulls at his great grizzled jaws. . . . The provodnik, with an ex-mineral-water bottle, sprinkles the dirty floor. He sweeps out your compartment, knocking things with the brush out of the cuspidor, sweeping them out of your cubicle down the long compartment. It grows dark. . . .

A wind storm has set up. It drives the dust in great clouds across the flat steppe, shutting out the sky—just the silhouette, miles away, of a turnip-domed Russian church rising in the gloom. A crescent moon stands out for a second, and then the clouds blot it out.

The provodnik comes in with a candle and lights your Pintsch light. And there, in the dull glow, you

see that the baby is awake. It has crawled down to the soldier's heavy, booted foot. It has been investigating the cigarette receptacles at the end of each bunk. It has found fifteen butts. It has taken them out, spread them on the Red soldier's blanket, and it is counting them there. . . .

You stare out of the window, and there is not one light on the dark, lonely Russian steppe.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

"VOLGA! VOLGA!"

THE moon rose like a scarlet balloon on that first Volga night. It had a feeling of emptiness, lightness as it floated off the earth. It cleared the black banks and left an unbroken path across the silky water. Red and yellow buoy-lights lay low down ahead. Ships came up-river like black ghosts with red and emerald eyes. Across the misty meadow shore glistened stands of silver birch. High ahead, on the "hill" bank, glimmered the lights of a village—a little cluster of fireflies. The *Turgenev* cut along silently, just the soft swish-swish of water curling under her foot. And in a narrow channel where we were forced close to a tug towing two petroleum barges we caught snatches of song. . . .

The *Turgenev* swung and veered, sometimes cutting directly across river, following the buoy-lights, so that at times the moon was on one side of us and then on the other. The Volga up here, below Nijni-Novgorod, is like a succession of long lakes, cut off from open vistas by the wandering right bank. By day that right bank is red, red sandstone, wooded with autumn forests in all their glory. The left bank is always a low green swamp. It goes on that way, with only one

or two elevations, for fifteen hundred miles. All the way down to the Caspian.

It runs that way, say the geologists—trying to explain the matter—because the great Russian rivers always incline toward the right. And so the right bank is always high—right down to the Caspian—and all the changes you see are the villages on its heights, the forests dying away, and then that terrific straight line drawn across the sky—the steppes. That's the bare statement of things.

But that's not the Volga. No, thank God! The Volga is a miraculous river! Consider: in the autumn, off Nijni, it is only 500 yards wide, and in the spring—at the same spot—it is thirteen miles. Or think of statements like this: "The harbour of Prokovsk changes its place, depending upon water-level, whether high or low. During the high water, from the harbour to the centre (middle of town), fifty kopecks per cab. When the water-level is normal the harbour is transferred to the petroleum tank beyond the town, which is connected with the town by a local railway line." And did I not have to walk that miserable sandy distance to the town?

Then the "Bow of Samara," where the Volga, flowing south, hits the Zhigulev mountains—quite 1,000 feet high!—and has to turn east, fighting through the hard rock, to turn due west and struggle for the south. We went into the "bow" in driving rain, the *Tovarish Raskilnikoff* shaking and straining in the gale. We went into it like a blind dragon who has reached some unknown hills. Water flicked with white caps, vast shallows in mile-wide windy bends. This was the

country of the bandit, Stenka Razin, the pirate of the Volga, and soldiers below decks sang his song. Sparsely settled, the Russians still speak of these deep pine and oak forests as "virgin country." And yet, as I stared, I might have been looking into the Catskills. Yes, until we rounded the bend and came to Samara with its turnip church-tops and factory chimneys sticking up against the leaden sky. . . .

Strange river on this moonlit first night. . . . We swept close to the bank, to a stone river wall, with the ghost of a white church rising from the water's edge. Silver turbans, gleaming in the night, rising up amidst their black cypress in Arabic silhouette. Makaryev Convent! Dead now. Closed. But you wonder what had gone on there—an eastern tale like this on the Volga, a tale in church turbans and stone—dark, mysterious, romantic and deserted. . . . Peasants, looking at these fantastic domes, thought they saw God! The river grows dark and cold. . . .

Strange river, flowing on sluggishly across dreary Russia. Monotonous. And yet with things like this to hold you: the country of the Maries—islands between you and the forests behind the low left shore. Shaggy headed horsemen galloping over them, riding their flecked horses down the river bank, staring at you. And behind them on the flat lands, hundreds of queer fenced hayricks, like old boyars' hats. . . . The dark log huts of the Tartars. That smell of the steppes when the gale sweeps the sand, and you pass Kalmuck villages—just a low line of secret roofs along the flat line of the bank. Camels pulling water-carts up through the yellow gorges in the river bank. The crows, whirl-

ing like black spray around the church domes of Rabotki—the bells have frightened them; they rise up and when the bells stop gonging they fly back and sit on the rigging of the golden crosses. Graveyards behind a steppe village, the crosses leaning like the trees of a dead forest. Villages built on yellow clay, log block houses and mud huts the colour of the dirt—except those that have the huge white church lording it over them. And behind, where they can catch the wind, clusters of crazy windmills. They have six vanes, some of them, and waving behind a village like that they look like mad old men running along and falling off the roof tops. . . .

And then green again where the Volga islands splatter across miles of water. And you suddenly see a full city, its church domes glistening, standing on an isolated plateau. It is so mysterious that you wonder at its name—a name that was famous six hundred years ago!

Always you have come down along that high right bank; it has changed from red sandstone and forests to just a long line along the sky. The world is flattening out now. The Volga slows and wanders among its mud flats, rolls in sluggish yellow waves into the Caspian Sea.

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE VOLGA BOAT SONG—AS IT IS!

FOR years I have heard it. In every cabaret, tea-shop and amateur performance. And now . . .

I am on the *25th October*. I have been on the *Tavarish Raskilnikoff* and the S.S. *Turgenev*. And—as I ride second class—I always hear these yells underneath me. The Volga Boat Song. But how differently it sounded in Chicago. How much more Russian! All day long, and most of the night, I have to listen to Volga or "Stenka Razin." All day long, and most of the night, I hear the accordions going—and these yells!

And yet, although the singing beneath me now is simply abominable, it is probably the one memory I shall always carry away with me. That memory born in the dark layer of steam and people in the deck below mine. It was in the Chuvash country. We had just taken aboard a load of apples and peasants. Just below Kazan. We had started down the Volga again, our fresh load of fourth-class passengers still scrambling for places among the cargo below. People were sleeping down there on barrels; head on one barrel, tail on another, feet on a third. They were sleeping on bales, hatches, toilet-drains, on the floor. Sleeping, eating, drinking—and singing—at the same time. Mothers

were feeding their babies at the breast. Girls were sitting up against machinery crates doing their hair. One girl, with her sleeping sweetheart's head in her soft lap, was fighting the mob to keep them from trampling on him. That somewhat untidy vegetable, the water-melon, was everywhere. In all stages of decomposition and digestion. Literally, there was not room enough to swing a cat—and yet they danced. They danced and they sang. And the awful part of it was that as I listened to them I could not help but think of that excruciating take-off in Noel Coward's revue called " A Russian Picnic."

" Whoop-whiskey-popski!"

I went down below-deck, from first and second into the third and fourth class—for we have these classes, mind you, in spite of democracy. The fourth class travels with the cargo. And there I found it, lying among the boxes and bales, in sheepskin, burlap, dirty homespun and cotton wraps—Tartars, Russians, Ukranians, Kalmucks and Chinese. They were all listening—at least, all those who were awake simply had to listen—to a young man with an accordion who was squatting in a corner.

" Whoop-whiskey-popski!"

Before him, on the general sleeping-shelves which the *Raskilnikoff* provides, sat two young Chuvash girls. Their heads were tied in white kerchiefs, their pug noses and high-cheeked faces were exactly alike, and they sat there like two birds on a branch. They were singing with little " coops " like the waves of a sea:

" Whoop-de-da-da . . . whoop-de-da-da . . . whoop!"

The accent was on the " whoop." As they sang a young man danced. He wore a black rubaska belted round his middle and knee-high leather boots. He was sweating. When the girls went whoop, he flung his arms, dropped so that his hams hit his heels, and bounded into the air. Then he spun. . . . He was dancing between the sleeping-shelves, in a greasy aisle, in a space about six feet by three. Drop, spin, fling . . .

" Whoop-de-da-da . . . whoop-de-da-da . . ."

The Chuvash girls sang without ever moving their heads. They just sat there on that worn sleeping-shelf, in that dark, dirty, sweating heat—just aft the engine-room—and they sang there like birds. Their faces were placid and serious; they had been doing this all their lives; so had their mothers and theirs before them—sitting there, with their hands folded in their laps, singing in the Volga boats, or in those dark little log cabins on shore. It was more than an even chance that they could neither read nor write. And I wondered, as I watched, what their ideas could be of the outside world. This between-decks section of a Volga steamer was probably the most sophisticated atmosphere they had ever been in. . . .

" Whoop-de-da-da . . . whoop!"

But a few days later we were " boarded," as it were, by three musicians who were professionals. I did not know it at first, but as I was walking past the fourth class after-deck a man called up to me. He was pale and bearded. A romantic vagabond—and one of the most barefaced beggars I ever came across. He asked

me for money, he asked me for cigarettes, he suggested I buy him some wine.

"All right," I said gloomily. "I'll get you a bottle at the next stop."

He was shocked. "A bottle? Never!" He held up a dirty forefinger and thumb: "Just a tiny, tiny little glass like that, so me and my companions will sing for you better."

I gave him a rouble.

The three of them had accordions, and the stunt of their show was that with each new tune the clown of their lot produced a smaller accordion, until finally he was pulling squeaks out of an instrument about as big as a vest-pocket camera. It sounded like someone stepping on a cat. It went over big with the fourth class; they threw copper and silver in the romantic beggar's hat. But one man, a heavy moustached Caucasian in furs and sheepskin—a gentleman whom I had just decided I would not like to meet on a dark night—slid down heavily from his bale and said:

"I, too, am an artist."

"What?" said the romantic beggar. "What do you do? What town are you from? I don't believe you."

"You don't, eh?" leered the Caucasian. "You wait! I'll get my card."

He went off, and the romantic beggar said: "I don't believe him. If he is one I'll believe him, but he'll have to show me his book."

The Caucasian came back and produced a greasy little brown book, the U.S.S.R. Union registration card. Inside was his photo in kaftan, with cartridge

pouches on his chest, sword on hip, and high white sheepskin cap.

" Ha!" he cried, waving a henna-stained hand. " I am not an artist, eh? What about that?"

He unfolded a poster, an advertisement of himself, walking a tight-rope between two minarets.

" I belong to a circus," he said. " I am going to walk the rope in Baku."

The fourth class crowded around—a real tight-rope artist!—and as if disheartened by such competition the romantic beggar and his lot got off at Saratov.

" Chort rasmi!" waved the tight-rope man. " The devil take you!"

CHAPTER XL

LIFE ON THE VOLGA

SHIPS bring life and they carry it away, and you will not realise the immensity of this simple statement until you travel on the Volga.

Today I saw a peasant woman come aboard our steamer carrying her baby in her mouth. She was holding it just the same way the proverbial stork is supposed to deliver them—in a cloth. There are fourteen people sleeping on our aft cargo hatch. One is a woman with two children about two and three years old. Their bed is made of her cloth bundles. The babies lie on their backs, their eyes closed to the electric bulb which hangs over the hatch. Beside the woman sleeps a Tartar, a flowered skull-cap on his bullet head. Another woman sleeping on that hatch has a face like weathered oak. Yet there is an attempt at attractiveness in her pink calico dress, and as she was sleeping when I passed her just now, I saw two carved silver bracelets on her old wrists. Probably her wedding-gift fifty years ago. Along the line of our engine-room just now are two long lanes of grain sacks. Last night these places were held by peasants sleeping against the warm pipes, lying in long lines along the narrow passage-way—so narrow that you had to walk carefully for fear that you would tread on their

hands. The engine-room has glass windows around it, and those of the peasants who are awake stare wonderingly at the mechanics working on the Diesels that drive *Uritsky* down the stream.

There is a radio just aft the third-class sleeping-shelves between the decks. Last night I saw the peasants standing there listening, with their mouths open, to an opera singer a thousand miles away. Their wonderment was pathetic, but it recalled an amusing peasant comment on the invention. He had been listening to talk about Soviet politics by wireless.

"Devil take them!" he said; "before they had to say it to our faces, but now they can stay in Moscow and lie to us from there."

On this hatch slept a man and woman, both of them on their line of wooden suit-cases. They had spread blankets along them. They slept with the cargo shifting past them. A dead, dazed sleep; and one wondered where Life was taking them on this Volga pilgrimage. They seem to travel with all their worldly belongings. When the peasants go ashore their arms are so full of bundles, with others hung on their backs, that the gangway men take their tickets from their mouths. They move off like sheep, herded in long lines; and they rush off in a frenzied stampede. I saw a peasant woman with two crying children. The ship was made fast. She seized her bundles, threw them over her sturdy back, and started down the gang-plank with the mob; her two children seized her skirts and were dragged along in her wake.

Where they are going and what they are doing God only knows! The sight is appalling. As the steamer

comes to a landing-stage they begin to line up. You see peasants whose bearded faces are as brown as their homespun coats, girls in light sapphire tam-o'-shanters, obvious "wrong 'uns," whose pallid, lined faces betray a lifetime of depravity—they all pour out of the bowels of the ship. They land at some wretched village; and you wonder what the man with the face like sin is doing there.

There are 700 people sleeping on the shelves, hatch-covers and cargo of the *Uritsky*. There is a Persian with a multi-coloured coat and a stiff leg that he has to move with his hand. There is a man with no legs at all, who shoved himself aboard in a three-wheeled little cart, propelling himself with iron-tipped pointed sticks. There are young peasant mothers down there who suckle their babies as they talk with the crew. Four men, as I passed them just now, were having a beer party around a keg-head. Four others were playing cards. Other peasants were getting drunk on vodka sold across the little counter of the between-decks café. As a quick lunch for the peasants they serve little slips of salt herring. Sophistication and seeing life: to drink your vodka, chew herring and watch the oiling in the engine-room.

The galley, the kitchen for the ship, is just aft this sombre bar. Chefs in white aprons and hats cutting up the big sides of beef, pigs, calves we have just bought on the way. A sailor carries down a fresh-killed calf from a village. It is already skinned. The chef gets his knife out and begins to hack. He boils the head and skins that himself, pulling to get the covering off the nose. The greasy head lies glistening.

That evening we have " knuckle of veal " for dinner. At the next village, the chef tells me, we will get some fine sterlet—a little fish like sturgeon. We get them—alive!—wicker crates of them. And the cook pulls up the floor of his galley and shows me a " live car " down below: a little cell in which the water of the Volga runs through from some holes. He dumps the sterlet into the well, and I watch them swim around. Next day at luncheon, when we have sterlet, I know from where they came. This ship lives off the country!

The Volga is in flood. All day long we are passing forests in water. The tips of willows, alders and limes, just showing above mid-stream. The river wanders miles back from us through the country. At Yurino, below Nijni, we find the river so high that the landing-stage is hundreds of yards out in the Volga. We round up to it, see it straining against its anchor cables, the passengers rowing out from shore. And peasants already there trying to get aboard our steamer to buy bread. " Have you bread?" they beg, their Finnish faces squinting under our landing lights. This is the country of the Maris, driven up here from Don by the Huns two hundred years before Christ.

We come to the country of the Chuvash, see lettering and a tongue of which we had not even known. The flat-faced little peasant girls are selling red flowers, smoked sterlet and—bad eggs. The stevedores trot in and out of our ship. Mothers cry as they kiss their daughters good-bye—for a steamer's whistle on the Volga is just as much a heart-wrench as it is at New York. At the Spask we run up a backwater and find the remnants of old ships. One, washed away by

spring floods, has nothing left but her engine stranded on the shore—the ice has picked her clean. The peasants here try to row into our paddles—just to see how close they can come—and the girls wear little silver crescents in their ears.

A fat, yellow-faced merchant from Astrakhan sits eating and drinking all day long in the second class saloon. An officer of the Red army, bound for Tashkent, walks arrogantly around the decks in his vivid white tunic, a revolver lanyard round his shoulder. A priest in green cassock with a silver cross on his breast—brave chap!—asks me if I talk French. When I say " Yes," he says he doesn't.

And neither, to be truthful, do I.

CHAPTER XLI

NOT SO GOOD

BEHIND the sighing cedar trees which line the main street of Tiflis, where warrior-like Georgians ride about in European tram-cars with swords and daggers in their silvered belts, stands the little mustard-coloured palace of the Grand Duke Nicholas, who has just died at Nice. At the end of the walled palace garden is a photographer's shop; and outside this shop is (at least there was) a three-foot enlargement of a distinguished Georgian official. No one passing in the streets of this very modern little capital would ever think of connecting that smiling photograph with the palace, nor would it ever occur to them to connect either of them with Amanulla Khan, the King (now the ex-King) of Afghanistan. Yet, if the history told me is true, all three things combined to end in a rather precipitous exit of Amanulla from Tiflis—and the death of that smiling man in the photograph.

It was, so the story runs, when Amanulla was returning to his uneasy kingdom. He had been entertained royally in Berlin, London and Moscow—all three Governments vying with each other to secure this potentate's favour. In England he had slept in Buckingham Palace, and queer tales were told there of the

domestic habits of his suite. He was taken to see the fleet, to see for himself that Britannia rules the waves. He was shown the "mechanised army" and the Horse Guards. And also, at that time, there appeared an article in one of London's biggest papers saying that a plot had been discovered to assassinate Amanulla when he reached Moscow—perhaps, in view of this serious situation, Amanulla wouldn't go?

But Amanulla went. And although the Soviet Russians hate all kings on principle, they either hate or fear Great Britain most of all. And so Amanulla was accorded an imposing and most cordial welcome. He was shown the Soviet factories, the Soviet statistics—and the Red army. He was shown aeroplanes and many tanks. He was shown the map, and shown there that the sea and Britain's fleet were a long, long way from Afghanistan; and that if vassal India did stretch up to one border of his domains, mighty Russia—which covers one-seventh of the globe—stretched up to him on the other hand. And this was a hand of friendship for a progressive little country, anxious to maintain its independence. And so, apparently, Amanulla and the Russians shook hands on it.

The dancing and the dinners waned, and Amanulla and his Consort took up their journey homeward again. He would go back to put into force in his kingdom the reforms he had witnessed in other countries. A progressive and independent Afghanistan—no longer made a weakling for England by its ancient backwardness. And so, fêted and flattered, Amanulla arrived at Tiflis. And here, so the story runs, Amanulla and his queen were given another official banquet.

This banquet was given in the little palace which once belonged to the Grand Duke Nicholas. It is now the headquarters of the Tiflis Soviet. And here, in royal style, the Russians entertained him, plying him with caviare from the Caspian, the smoked salmon of the Baltic, and the wines and champagne of the Caucasus.

It is not recorded, in the story, whether Amanulla drank any wine himself or not. Probably he merely sipped his glass in response to the toasts of many eulogistic speeches. It does not need to be recorded whether there were speeches or not, because whenever Russians get together, no matter what the occasion, speeches are inevitable. And here, as the tale nears its end, like sand slipping down through the hour-glass, this distinguished Georgian made the most rousing address of the evening. He was overcome by it—and the wine—and with a brimming glass in his hand he walked unsteadily along the table to the King of Afghanistan.

"I salute you," he said, and, draining his glass, he leaned down with the warm-hearted manners of his native mountains to kiss the king in friendship.

Amanulla pushed him away.

The Georgian did not seem to notice this. He bowed to the Queen; and then it was seen that his intention was to kiss Souriya also.

Amanulla stood up. He made a sign. And then, as the appalled Georgians stared, Amanulla and his suite left the banquet-room. He left Tiflis at once, without waiting for the three days of fêting that had been planned for him.

The news flashed to Moscow. Moscow demanded that the official should explain himself. But this the smiling man of the photograph could not do, as he had put a bullet through his head.

And, after all, what was there to be said?

CHAPTER XLII

ALBERT THE AMBITIOUS

"HERE," he said, putting down a specimen in alcohol between the bread and cold sturgeon, "is my kidney!"

I nearly passed out. Albert had been telling me about his kidney all day. He had lost it last summer, the famous surgeon having lived just long enough to remove Albert's kidney, thus saving his life before he lost his own through diabetes. The Bolshies had treated Albert very handsomely: he had the operation, two and a half months in hospital, two months in a rest-home in the Caucasus—all free of charge.

"Look," he cried. "You can see the three stones."

I looked, saw that the kidney was the same colour as the cold sturgeon, and told Albert that I didn't feel hungry.

"Bitte," he begged in German, for he was a German colonist and that was the tongue he knew best. "Wie gemutlich."

He was an amazing youth. Utterly unselfconscious. He told me that prior to his kidney escapade he had been thrown in prison by the Bolshies, where he had stayed seven months, for making a speech about their interfering with the Church. He said he'd made that speech because his mother had always brought him

up to respect the Church, and he respected his mother —she had worked like a dog to see that he got his education, and she'd bought him this home on the hills above Tiflis—and, after all, he was a worker, and when the workers in his railway works heard he had been thrown in jail they wrote a petition with five hundred names, and sent it up to Moscow to Kalenin; and Kalenin wrote back saying he should be liberated from prison and given full pay for all the time he had been in it, and——

" Bitte!" jumped Albert, spearing another piece of sturgeon. " You must eat!"

He sang German songs, " Oh, Isabella, du bist mein ideal . . .," while I tried to masticate the sturgeon. He also kept my glass full with the red wine of his village, which wasn't much better than grape-juice. He played on the guitar.

This took place in his little worker's home on the hills above Tiflis—Tiflis, just a rut of lights now, lying in the dark valley of the Kura.

" Yes," he exulted, leaving off singing for a while, " this is all mine. I get 150 roubles a month from the factory. I own this house—although I lose money on the rent I am allowed to take—and my food only costs me about 50 roubles a month."

Both of us stared around the room, and while Albert's gaze was ecstastic—particularly at the impressive desk with the white statue of Lenin on it, under the litho of Stalin—mine held quite as much admiration. For here, I knew, five people were living in one room. It was a typical proletarian worker's home in everything except one important detail—it was immaculate. But it

showed what really could be done when one had one's heart in it. Here lived Albert, his brother and sister-in-law and their two children. His brother and wife slept in the white bed in one corner; Albert occupied the red sofa in a diagonal direction, and the two children slept in an iron cot by the desk. Aside from that there was the table on which we were eating, a potted palm, a whatnot in the other corner on which the kidney-jar held a place of honour, and above the entrance door were two plaster of paris stags' heads with red-painted antlers like crabs' claws.

" That is where I study," said Albert, pointing to his beloved desk (you don't realise what joy study is to these poor Russians.) " I have already made one invention which saves the works 26,000 roubles a year. I have had my picture in the Moscow papers. They gave me a scholarship to Leningrad. I shall be an engineer!"

We had been out all day with him in his little German colonists' village on the desert-like tablelands south of Tiflis. A hamlet so small that it did not even have a railway station. The train just stopped. And then a Georgian came galloping up with two horses and drove us back to where Marienfeld lay among its poplars and walnut trees by a dry river. The Georgians occupied one end of the muddy street and the German colonists held the other. There was no barrier between them, but when you passed the last Georgian house you came to painted walls and some attempt at sidewalks and porches—although you left the pretty Georgian girls behind you. The Georgians were sitting under the walnut trees while their womenfolk threshed the

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corn. But all the Germans, dressed in their best Sunday black, were in church.

It was a harvest festival. All the pews were draped with ears of red and yellow maize, garlands of grapes dangled from the choir balcony, the aisle was lined with cabbages and huge beets; apples, pears, walnuts, beans, bowls of wheat and honey, lined the altar steps; the pulpit looked like a grape arbour. The shawl-headed women and girls sat in the right pews. The men held the left. They were Germans; they looked it, talked it, thought in it—although they were the descendants of Swabians who had come here over a hundred years ago. But they were a little sad at the moment; on the largest pumpkin on the altar steps was carved this cynical motto:

"The labourer is worthy of his hire—but the wages of this world is ingratitude."

Albert read the motto and laughed. He had long ago left his village. When we were eating luncheon in his mother's house he suddenly seized his peasant brother's rough hand. He pointed to the horny, block-like fingers.

"Look!" he said, without thinking of its cruelty. "That is the hand of a peasant."

His brother smiled and did not seem to mind it. He was too interested in my fountain-pen—the first one he had ever seen in his life. "Why," he cried, "the ink is inside it!" Albert laughed again. He laughed again as we were running through the corn-fields, and his brother offered to run with all our heavy bundles so that we would not miss our train.

" I can run with all of them," said the peasant. " I can run with two poods " (72 lbs.).

Albert was laughing now as we sat in his worker's home in Tiflis. His little village of Marienfeld, with its peasant life, lay only twenty-five miles away. But as far as he was concerned it might have been in another world.

CHAPTER XLIII

ASTRAKHAN

"The dullness of that scurvy little town was terrible."—TCHEHOV: *The First Class Passenger.*

A CITY built in the middle of a river could hardly be dull. Yet only its incredible dreariness could have saved Astrakhan from that stereotyped subtitle—"the Venice of Russia." Astrakhan, one of travel's disillusionments, is so remarkably dull that merely a few days in it will suffice to give you a sympathetic comprehension of those eccentric characters in Russian short stories and novels which have always more or less baffled the Western mind. People who do things, such as blowing out their brains, from nothing but sheer boredom. The most romantic thing about Astrakhan—that fabled city of the Kalmucks beside the Caspian Sea—is its wonderful name.

Its prelude, to us, had been at Kamenny Yar—three Asiatic camels nibbling the willows on the bank, with the Volga beginning to wander like bright metal among the sand-bars and flat steppes. Steppes like a straight line drawn against the sky, with a low line of secret roofs across river marking Shishkinskoye, the holy place of the Kalmucks, where the god Burkhan happened to stay on his wanderings from China. And at midnight, on the desolate landing-barge of Yenota-

kevsk, when two Kalmucks came out of our ship and stared at us before going into darkness, shivering in the shrill steppe wind, their tight-waisted, pleated sheepskin coats hugged about bodies so slender and faces so delicate that at first I thought they must be girls. Another Kalmuck, in a high pointed hat, leaned under the landing light, smiling at our big steamer, the *25th October*, with a smile that seemed to have started back in Thibet.

And then, in the dawn, there was Astrakhan! Peering from my porthole with a lust that had been whetted by that wonderful name for twenty-five years, I saw a wind-swept immensity of muddy water, a long row of wooden fish wharves, and the slate-coloured domes of a blood-red church. On the other side of the ship was another wooden wharf up which a dismal line of Kalmuck porters were carrying sacks of flour from our ship. Kalmucks, dressed just as you or I would be—if we should suddenly turn stevedore. Not the nomads of the steppes.

A jolting ride over pitted cobbled streets away from the mud-bank of the river; open lots littered with refuse and dead dogs, rotting wooden houses, long lines of dilapidated plaster-faced brick—into the " centre " of the usual Russian provincial town. A mud square, surrounded by acacias; streets laid out in cross-sections whose dwellings were in that peculiar Russian state where nothing ever seems permanent, houses either being built, torn down—or falling down. . . . It was true that the drab streets were full of Tartars, Russians, Kalmucks, Armenians, Persians—all Asia, it seemed—yet they were dressed like the people of Moscow,

with the distressing uniformity of the nondescript garments of proletarian Russia. They had been denatured by Astrakhan's urban influence. And the one bright spot of colour was an Asiatic potentate from the foothills of Thibet, a man dressed in high scarlet cap and robe of canary silk, a bland, unmoved—and unmovable—personage who had reserved every room in Astrakhan's one possible hotel.

There was an escort of Red soldiers waiting for him in the street. And his painted and powdered aide-de-camp—an officer who had rouged the lids of his eyes—was so unfamiliar with the manners of Communism that he actually hit his isvostchik (hired driver), with his leather portfolio. But perhaps it was only a playful wallop that he gave that bearded Russian's padded back.

The hotels in Astrakhan have no restaurants—there is no reason, in such a city, for dining out—and it was an hour after rapping vainly at the cellar door of the "Paradise" (an Asiatic café), that we found a confectioner's where we made a sickly breakfast of meringues and chocolate éclairs.

This was Sunday, and the denizens of Astrakhan were walking out. In polished boots and overcoats they strolled down the main street. Some of them sat down under the acacia trees in the square. But most of them went into the circus—a zoo, where they had a few shabby tigers, monkeys, parrots, a tortoise, a boa-constrictor and an unhappy Polar bear. The bear provided great amusement, for he had a bath in his little cage, full of dirty straw and dead leaves, and the keeper coaxed him to jump into it.

"Fish! Fish!" he called to the almost starving bear. And the bear slid reluctantly into its wretched pool, and the crowd roared with laughter, because, you see, there were no fish. . . .

And crawling around the zoo was another feature of Russian life—a hopeless cripple. His legs trailed behind him, encased in long leather bags, like the fingerless mitts he wore on his hands. He flapped about the zoo this way, like a seal, and when he saw the brown bear's cage he flapped over and pulled himself upright, and he and the bear stared at each other.

And so we left the zoo and went over and stood below the cream-coloured walls of Astrakhan's ancient kremlin. Scalloped walls, thirty feet high, that had known men in armour; a great-walled bluff city in the very heart of Astrakhan, a fortress that had seen some very real fighting within recent years, for around some of the swallow-tailed battlements were the pock-marks of bullets, and similarly splattered plaster dwellings across cobbled streets spoke of snipers and sharpshooters of the Red and White Wars. And at its main gate rose a high tower of buff stone, stones like those of the old sun-bleached churches of Spain, a tower with deep shadows around its green bells; and behind, like five copper helmets, floated the fantastic cupolas of an empty church. We stared, wondering what could have happened to Astrakhan that its present should be so paltry compared to its glory of the past.

And then we turned to the river again, for there, we felt, no city could be dull. We came to a marketplace where the people swarmed like flies, to the dirty banks of a stagnant canal where the vendors lived in

unpainted wooden boats, sleeping over their "live cargoes" of sudac and live sturgeon, where they pulled out flapping fish to sell us, moonstone-eyed, scaly-flanked, fish with little noses as sharp as a fox's, fish four feet long. We were offered milk, boiled in gourd-shaped earthen urns, hacks of meat from a carcass being skinned, tubs of salted herring, buckets of still-swimming yellow perch, slabs of sweet pink salmon. Chinamen, six feet high, with faces like yellow idols, walked about hung with ladies' garters, second-hand corsets, pencils, knives—and a girl beggar with an unmentionable disease exhibited her rotting knee in the cold sun. A barber shaved men's heads among the tubs of salted fish.

Here was glory. Glory in the great glut of blood, in the corpse-hung butcher's shop, in the bales of strange herbs and dyes, in the mounds of many-coloured fruits, in the cries, shouts, imprecations, jostles of the crowd. A peasant thrusts her arm into a washtub and pulls out a great flapping carp.

"Buy him, dear one!" she cries to me. She makes a sucking sound with her teeth, imitating tasting. "Buy him, dear one, he's sweet!"

Yes, a city built on a river could never be dull!

CHAPTER XLIV

UPS AND DOWNS ON THE CASPIAN

I HAVE been seasick eighteen hours in a bunk full of fleas!

We came down from Astrakhan. People imagine that Astrakhan is on the sea. It isn't. It's just about as close to the Caspian as Philadelphia is to the Atlantic. There's a good sixty miles of Volga between them, a Volga that splits up and wanders around like the roots of a tree, and sweeps out of a muddy delta seventy-two miles wide. A Volga so shallow at its navigable mouth that the tortuous channel is marked by sticks stuck in the mud, and hours after you have been thinking you were at sea you see a Kalmuck fisherman, apparently walking on water, only twenty feet from your ship. The Caspian rolls up in dirty waves across miles of mud-flats, pelicans troop with their gawky flight across the yellow evening sky, and your little steamer, with the night coming down, paddles hour after hour, out to the Twelve Foot Road, where the S.S. *Zinoviev* is waiting for your miserable body.

As we sailed out we saw the fishing fleet coming in. Rough built two-masters, black, with a sort of Asiatic standing-lug; their sharp-pointed sails, wing and wing, looked like butterflies on the calm water. Yes, it was calm then. As we passed them, fur-clad, slant-eyed

men with broad cheekbones stared up at us from loads of equally strange fish. Kalmucks and sturgeon! Little skiffs bobbed miles out in the open, shallow water, men in shaggy sheepskins and fur hats leaning over their sterns, hauling gillnets out of the brown sea, flapping glittering shavings of silver back into the black boats. The " carry " tugs were waiting out there in the open sea with steam up to tow these fishermen back to the land. Geese and long strings of duck, trailed along the yellow-green Asian sky. It seemed as if almost anything could happen in such an utter desolation.

And it did. An incredible thing happened. Out there, hours after we had been slogging out into the open sea, we came on a ship. It was an engineering steamer from the river department, come down the Volga from Nijni-Novgorod, and on her was a Peoples' Commissar, one of the ten big men of Russia. We did not know this at first. We merely hung over the rail and wondered as our ship swung around and made fast to that strange ship at anchor, and men and women came out of that other ship, crossing over to us on a rickety gang-plank, followed by more men bearing guns, rifles, moving-picture cameras, radios, suit-cases and despatch bags. We wondered at one big man who seemed to shake hands all around with the other ship's crew before he came out of her, at the cheer they gave him with all the sailors standing at her rail in salute, the scarlet banner they broke out at her foremast. But then we ceased to wonder for we were told that the Big Man was a Peoples' Commissar, going down to the Caucasus to shoot game. We also learned that his party had taken all the first-class cabins.

Then our ship turned, her paddle-wheels going, and we steamed for another few hours out to where the water was twelve feet deep. The Commissar and his suite were already below in that nice first-class saloon, eating an enormous tea of cakes and fruits, playing mah jong and chess; they made us so hungry, looking at them, that we went down into our second class and tried to forget ourselves in the howls and tambourine thuds of a travelling Persian orchestra.

Out in what must have been the very middle of the Caspian lay the *Zinoviev*. She was at anchor, just a few lights in the night. We paddled up to her, made fast, put a gang-plank aboard, and poured into her one of the weirdest collections of human beings I have ever seen in my life. Persians, Turks, Armenians, Russians, Georgians, Daghestanese, gipsies. . . . They charged through the mid-sea stevedores carrying loads on their backs, and scuttled around the *Zinoviev's* decks hunting for places out of the wind. Yes, the wind was freshening now, beginning to look like a bad night.

The deck passengers seemed unaware of this. A Georgian boy and his young bride made a bed for themselves just aft the deck-house. They unrolled their baggage and spread out a heavy quilt decorated with roses. Then they put all their valuables around them inside. Then they tucked themselves in. The deck light above them shone on the man's grin and the girl's curly golden hair.

"Ai!" she cried, cuddling up. "This is a fine place."

My Caucasian tight-rope walker, whom I had met a few days before on the Volga, was also on this ship.

But he had been late getting across the gang-plank and so had to make his bed down on the bare deck. He was very glum; his henna-reddened moustachios drooped like a Chinaman's. By the engine-room was a baby, wrapped like a papoose, placed against a warm steam-pipe. Its mother was sleeping on a skylight. At the very stern, a gaily coloured Persian family made its bed—a few well-worn rugs—and their bright-eyed child tried to make a seesaw out of a stray plank. Hundreds of other deck passengers stuffed themselves in sullenly wherever they could get. All of this was out in the cold, wet wind—the forerunner of a real gale.

Inside the first-class saloon the Commissar's party had already rigged up a wireless set and were listening to the men of the "Krassin" back in Moscow lecturing about the Nobile fiasco. My wife and I were given a first-class cabin, by the courtesy of the captain, next door to a couple of men, baggage-bearers of the Big Man's party. Our cabin looked comfortable; the polished wood bunks were broad and upholstered; we had an excellent dinner of cold sturgeon and potato salad; then we lay down to sleep. . . .

"OOOOO-oooo-o-o . . ." went the wind. The *Zinoviev*, her paddles thrashing, lurched down the dark Caspian Sea. ". . . oooo-OOOO!"

It must have been an hour later when I woke up. Something was biting me. Something full grown—fleas! I hit the floor. I hit the floor—and then I found that I was standing on the side of the wall. Well! . . . Crash! I found the light. A coat, hanging on the door, stood out at right-angles—my head hit the shutters. Bowsh! Chairs raced across the cabin and crashed into

the washstand. . . . Then they slid back. There were yells outside, howls from the deck—" Ya Allah!"—my tight-rope friend. . . . Groans of horrid agony above the shrill of the storm. I felt the port paddle miss. . . . We seemed to hang. Boom! a sea crashed under the wheel-house. The *Zinoviev* trembled, she balanced, and then the old paddle-wheeler seemed to fall away from me, falling, falling . . . like a fast-dropping elevator. . . .

I thought of those wretched people on deck—the boy and girl under the rose-patterned quilt—the gaily coloured Persians—of the People's Commissar. Well, he had helped to make a pretty good Revolution himself, but he had never made anything like this!

CHAPTER XLV

INTO THE COUNTRY OF THE KARACHAITES

IT was not by intention that we set out to cross the lower ranges of the Caucasus in the night. But we were anxious to get over into Khassaut, where we hoped to get a couple of pack-horses from the Karachaites; and despite the gloomy sunset we hoped for a half-moon. This, as luck had it, began to look down through its torn blanket of clouds just when we needed it most. When it caught us picking our way down the rocky slides of some precipice where the crags stood out sharp above a valley filled with mist, we blessed the delays that had led us to such enchantment.

This was the road to Karachay.

History is vague about the origin of the Karachaites. And it had better be; it seems as if every race had passed over this part of the Caucasus and left stragglers behind. In modern times the eleven thousand square miles of Karachay on the northern slopes of the main range have been a veritable Cave of Adullam for the discontented peoples, a refuge from Russian and Cossack. Some three thousand of its thirty-seven thousand inhabitants are the last of the almost extinct Circassians—that valiant people who, as a race, fought to the last drop of blood against the armies of

the Tzars. Turk and Tartar, Russian and Asiatic, Ghugizphan and Alexander. That is why, as you follow these pathless mountains, you will come on some cattle-breeder's " kosh " in a crater where the people are such as you have never seen before. Oval-faced, hawk-nosed men with sensuous lips and delicate hands like the figures in old Persian prints, whose women wear bloomers, and silver crescents in their ears, and stare at you across the dung fire with slender almond eyes. The girls sing to you from the shadows behind their menfolk—trilling, hesitant little songs that flutter like the leaves of an olive tree, while their men hum in variant keys like the sturdy boughs, until the leaves fall and the song dies in sadness. The next day, after a struggle up through the root-matted trail of pine forest, night will find you in the log huts of a rock-rimmed mountain crater where the men are big-boned and wide-eyed, simple featured like the peasants in " Evangeline," standing guard beside night-fires built of whole tree-trunks to keep the wolves from their goats and sheep. And the girls, who hand you bowls of sour milk as you squat beside the wood fires, have blue eyes and long plaits of golden hair.

These things I did not know. They lay ahead of me in the darkness. I knew only that the Karachaites talked a language that was a cross between Turkish and Tartar, and sounded like Chinese; that their country was a land of " water wet, grass green and mountains steep ", and that I was surely and steadily climbing into it, away from the sophisticated little kurort of Kislovodsk, whose chief delight was an oddly shaped rock which the rest-hunters there had

named " The Castle of Craftiness and Love." As it would be in such places . . .

For the first stretch, into Khassaut, we had departed from Kislovodsk in a " lineaka," a little flat mountain cart. We sat sideways, using our blanket rolls as a back-rest. It was driven by a Cossack and drawn by two wire-muscled Caucasian horses. These little animals, when they were standing still, looked like weary nags. But when they were moving, dragging the cart by sheer courage up the bouldered mountain roads, or sliding down with the rear wheels locked by chains —and the Doolittle and I stumbling after (twenty paces apart so that we would not crash over a rock in the other fellow's shadow)—these little horses put up such an exhibition of sure-footedness and staying power that we came to adore them. Especially when we could clamber aboard again and rest our weary legs.

" No, you!" yelled the Cossack, as a rear wheel began to send stones down the cliff. " Can't you see the road—fools?"

The road leading into the upper reaches from Kislovodsk gave no indication of this country. It climbed instead into an amazing upland that was as smooth as a lawn. Fold after fold of vivid green hills with not a stone or bush on them. Here and there only a ledge of limestone breaks through; and a peep over the grassy edge into the grey gorge of the river beside us assured us that we were actually in the Caucasus. Then we began to notice that we were quite alone in this world. We had been climbing for hours without even seeing one sheep. One or two Caucasian horsemen had passed us, magnificent in

their broad-shouldered " burkas " made from black felt, wearing their silvered daggers. Finally I saw what at first seemed a haystack on fire; but a low wall of mountain-stones around its bottom, and a man sitting before a smoky aperture, showed it to be a house. Our first Karachaite.

" He lives poorly," sniffed the Cossack, still feeling his ancient superiority over mountain tribesmen. "Life is hard here."

This was true. But in the little village lying by its stream down below we found one or two houses (built since the emancipation of the Karachaites by the Revolution) that even had tin roofs. We forded the stream here and kept on fording it, climbing onwards and upwards along its bouldered bed into the higher mountains. As each darkening ridge would lie across the night sky our driver would give a groan, an expressive wave of his hand, and a sad little singsong to tell us that we must go up that—and over.

Just before night did descend upon us, at the feet of one of these ridges, the Doolittle and I (with apologies) made the Cossack unlash our baggage so that we could get at sweaters and heavy coats. We were freezing. And it was only then that the fellow saw fit to mention that there had been a snowstorm yesterday in these ranges. He seemed particularly desirous to get on, and battened down the baggage with hitches over everything.

" Hurry," he urged, and said there were bad roads ahead. But we continued to ascend more smooth hills. Their upper levels were rounded and covered with alpine flowers that shone like stars under the flitting

moon. We went across rounded tops that were carpeted with buttercups and wild daffodils. And it was from such a windy spot, staring across forty miles of ridges and valleys, that we saw the eternal snows of Mount Elbruz, 18,000 feet, rising like a white ghost over the snowy range of the Central Caucasus. Beyond it lay the country of the Kabarda-Balkarians, people of Turco-Tartar and pure Arabian. Their capital was once a summer centre for Byzantium. The mountains below us dropped off sharply. And it was while we were paused like this, filled with delight, that we heard soft padding behind us. Two superb Karachaites came up from behind on their glistening black stallions. In a soft drawl they asked us whence, whither, and why. Our answers could have been calculated to surprise them, but they gave no sign of it. They lit cigarettes, the match's glow lighting up sharp beards and high cheekbones, and then they wrapped their white hoods over their fur caps and dropped over the edge. . . .

This, the Cossack told us, was where we got off and walked. With its rear wheels locked the cart went over the edge and down the slope. This was actually the road, although most of it was merely shelving slides of bare rock. It was extremely difficult not to slip and fall down it. A high ridge on our right showed sharp as a knife against the rising moon. The valley was flecked with shadows, striped with the horizontal lines of coloured rock strata; and here and there a little thread of silver showed where the moon caught the river down below. The cart rocked ahead of us, always threatening to go over into space. But it couldn't

spill anything; and we realised now the Cossack's care in battening down. Its progress was like a ship in a storm.

The hours crawled along. It got colder and colder. Finally things became desperate; I could no longer light a cigarette. My fingers were too numb. And I demanded if there ever was such a place as Khassaut.

"Here it is," said the Cossack.

He got off and rolled back a strange gate that had a wagon-wheel on its latch-end. The moon had gone under by now, and in the gloom I caught the white turret of a minaret. I saw the squat mosque underneath. There were no lights in the village. We drove past sleeping thatched huts. Then we stopped before a building which the Cossack told us was a school. Khassaut would put us up there for the night, but not so the schoolmaster.

"But these are strangers!" bellowed the furious Cossack, after a terrific hammering on the schoolmaster's window. "They are your guests!"

A muffled voice from inside told us to clear out.

We then tried the Ispolkom, the village council chamber, where our reception was exactly the opposite. As soon as he got it into his sleepy head that there were strangers outside, the secretary of the Ispolkom, who slept in one of its two rooms, unbolted its door. He was, noble fellow! suffering from toothache, with the rabbit's ears of a bandage projecting above his head. But he led us into his own bedroom, where his wife eyed us from among their bed of quilts on the board floor, and told us to spread our beds beside theirs. When we told him we did not wish to intrude

on their privacy (it was not altogether from modesty), he led us into the town council chamber. Here he brought some birch logs and started the iron stove. He gave us a pail of sparkling water, a glass full of butter, and his only lamp.

The Doolittle got his pocket primus going for tea while I spread out our beds on the floor. The Ispolkom secretary, apologising for the rude reception we had received from the Kuban Cossack school teacher, explained that, as one of the seven Russians in this village of four hundred "Tartars," the Cossack probably didn't care to open his door at night. The "Tartars" were peculiar. Six years ago they had broken into this very council room and killed the secretary of the Ispolkom and his wife.

But that, we decided, was six years ago. And as I threw open the windows of the Ispolkom committee room (to let in some air) I looked out on sleeping houses and the white minaret of a little mountain village that seemed as peaceful as its own whispering stream. It was only when I took a notion to go out for a walk that I realised such a present tranquillity must exist only in my own mind. Our door was locked—from the outside.

The present secretary of the Ispolkom was not taking any chances.

CHAPTER XLVI

SUNDAY IS NOT A MOHAMMEDAN HOLIDAY

DESPITE the cold, which chilled my spine before dawn, the sleep the Doolittle and I had, stretched out on the floor of the Khassaut council chamber, was the first good night's rest we had enjoyed for several days. It was shattered, however, about four in the morning by our Cossack driver, who had come to say good-bye. Hammering on the stone wall below our window, he declared he had had the deuce of a time trying to wake us. But we bore him no ill-will; he had brought us into Karachay; he had, despite the schoolmaster's refusal, found us a place to lie down; and now he must climb back over the mountains again. We raised ourselves from our warm flea-bags to clasp his hand. Good-bye. And now for some sleep. . . .

An hour later a Mongolian head appeared at our doorway. Then it withdrew to come back with more Tartar heads—all of them in fur hats. I shall speak of the Khassaut Karachaites as Tartars, because this particular lot are of the Turco-Tartar type. They were, it transpired, about to hold a meeting—if we would only dress. The young secretary of the Ispolkom (the inevitable Russian official), his toothache better, sailed into their midst and upbraided them for being so un-

civil; it was not often that foreigners came to Khassaut. The Tartars in return gave him the devil for accusing them of such a thing—they knew how to behave—and we could sleep there all day if we wanted to. Only—why couldn't they look? We dressed.

With that courtesy that is always found among remote people unspoilt by tourists, the secretary of the Ispolkom and his wife had put their room in order for our breakfast. His wife was our hand-maiden, dipping a tin mug into the bucket of clear water—fetched from the other side of the valley—and pouring it over my head and hands as I washed. An ancient custom. A Tartar on the balcony outside was intensely interested in what I was doing with my toothbrush. And I, seeing his even, white teeth, as he smiled, wondered how he could keep them that way without such an implement. A mutual curiosity.

"Yes," groaned the secretary's wife, "they hold meetings all day long. Meetings, meetings, meetings. . . . It's usually about horses."

Horse breeding and selling, it seemed, was the life of the Khassaut Karachaites. An auction was going on outside. This was being held around a three-forked tree-trunk stuck up outside the council chamber—the same strange three-forked hitching-post that we were to see outside of "koshes" and even in the capital of the Karachaites. It was also the auction block. With the men of the village lounging around, leaning against rocks in the warm sun, a bearded auctioneer in belted Caucasian tcherkaska and soleless boots, with the dagger in his belt, called out the bids as he rolled a cigarette. He did so casually, urging no one to buy, and he

seemed to knock off when he thought the price about right. At any rate, with these keen judges of horse-flesh—born in the saddle—there was not much chance of anyone being reckless. A first-class three-year-old went for two hundred roubles (£20), a cow was sold for £4. Once or twice, in his casual manner, the auctioneer forgot and called a bid lower than the one just offered. On such occasions he would smile jovially at his fellow-villagers, and begin all over again. Another Tartar, for my amusement, climbed up and sat in the three forks of the auction post—a childish bit of fun that seemed incongruous with the silvered dagger in his belt.

A rude and simple means of depicting this scene would be to recall to you the crack Circassian horsemen who used to snatch handkerchiefs from the circus grounds at full gallop with the shows of Buffalo Bill. Here they were in real life! And if you can picture those horsemen in a little mountain village of thatched stone houses with a white minaret standing up against some grey limestone crags, selling and buying horses, galloping down the main mud road after wayward grey cattle, smoking, gossiping, lying flat on their faces in the warm sun, you have a perfect picture of Khassaut on this Sunday morning. Friday is the Mussulman day of rest.

Like all good Mohammedans they were letting the women do most of the hard work. In one stone hut above us the women were softening a sheepskin. They were kneading it between wooden pincers. One woman pumped up and down on the long handle while a girl turned the skin between the notched

wooden teeth until it turned soft as chamois. It would make part of a white tcherkaska for the family sire, or a soft padded saddle. Outside another stone and plaster hut, on whose turf roof was already growing a good crop of grass, an old crone was weaving on a hand-loom. Another old hag sat beside her spinning thread from a plummet-like spindle which she set whirling with a rub against her old leg. The Fates of the Karachaites—of what battles with the Cossacks could those old women tell! In another house the young girls were making felt for rugs and burkas. They fluffed out the finely combed wool with the string of a bow (the same way I had seen them doing it in Anatolia); then they dampened it and rolled it into a homogeneous mass on a grate of wooden slats.

The wool came from the village sheep; their implements were made by the village craftsmen; cloaks, saddles, shoes, everything came from this mountainside. Other women worked in the meagre potato fields, the only village crop. Others walked across the single log which bridged the little Khassaut River and returned swaying under yoke and pails of spring water.

The mosque, which no woman dared enter, was completely carpeted with their small rugs, vivid in the designs they achieved with native dyes. And as I watched them their tiny sons, dressed in little tcherkaskas, with miniature dagger in belt—just like father's —rode beautiful black stallions down to water. And the little girls worked. Picturesque but——

Asiatic, the women were still the drudges, despite their emancipation proclaimed by the Soviets.

I climbed the minaret and looked out over thatched

roofs to the limestone crags above them. Did the Karachaites still use their mosque? Yes, said one, it was about half-full nowadays. Did they violate the Koran and drink strong drinks? Yes—grinning—a lot did. Was life better now? The answer was a satisfied nod. And it ought to be, for, under the Tzars, the Karachaites had been a most browbeaten lot; and their good lands, once held by the Cossacks, had now been given back to them. But despite the placard of agricultural statistics and advice in their council chamber, and the one of Lenin, printed in Karachaite, showing him pointing the way to the New Life—to tractors and away from bullocks, to textile mills instead of hand-looms—one felt that, good mountaineers as they were, these cattle-breeders had a long climb ahead of them on the rocky road of evolution. The young men, of course, thought they had already arrived. One of them, while we were standing on the minaret, to show his contempt for religion, that " opiate of the people," cupped his hands behind his ears and called to the faithful in mockery of a muezzin.

But he seemed to strike a false note.

CHAPTER XLVII

CLIMBING THE CAUCASUS

IT is extraordinary how seldom in one's travels you come across that elusive thing called Romance. But I felt it this morning in Karachay. To begin with, I awoke to the knowledge that we had our horses and that in an hour or so I would be in the saddle. How long I would stay in it was another matter. Then the first sight that met my eyes was the nobbly white bullet of a Tartar minaret. Then I walked up past the mosque and washed in Narzan, that sparkling mineral water that the Caucasians call " the drink of horses." Well and good. Then as I was eating my breakfast—a ten-egg omelette for the two of us—the young secretary of the Ispolkom, who was going into town with taxes and the percentage from yesterday's horse sales, was going over his automatic. A Spanish weapon made by Beistegui Hermanos—dangerous from both ends, I would say. Then—our kit lay ready packed. The trails of Karachay lay ahead of us.

I went outside and found the entire village—all the men and not one woman—waiting to see us start. While we waited for Djhon-hote, our Karachaite guide, to fetch the horses, I had to answer these questions: What time was it now in America? In New York, I told them, lots of the people were just going to bed.

Was New York in Berlin? Not exactly. Did we have snow in America? Summer? Was it hot? Hot as hell, I told them. Did we have sheep?—and did we have a hawk like that one flying overhead? Yes, I said, we had chicken hawks—but our sheep didn't have fat tails, and a black sheep in America was a rarity. (What a joke!) Did we have gold or paper money? I managed to discover an English two-shilling piece in my pocket and I gave it to the president of the Khassaut Soviet. He immediately tested it by bouncing it on a rock. Yes, it was silver. Was that the head of the Tzar? Yes, King George. Well . . . They were a bit silent.

A blanket roll on either side of Marusha's padded saddle; a rucksack full of fryingpans, kettles, a cheese, tea, raisins, etc., on top. Typewriter and small suitcase in the saddlebags on my Kolya. We were off. . . . The Doolittle, who had started ahead, walking up the valley road. . . . Don Quixote (Djhon-hote) walking at Marusha's head. And Kolya, as soon as I was atop of him, bursting off at full gallop. I kept him at it as hard as I could, not wishing to lower America's rating before these centaurs. A Circassian horse is no arm-chair. Whoa, Kolya, you . . .

Half an hour up the road I found the Doolittle sitting naked in the mountain stream. Bald-headed, with his billy-goat whiskers and the inevitable spectacles, he looked like the Royal Nonesuch. "Come in," he cried, "the water's fine." So I did. I stripped and lay down in this icy stream of the Caucasus and let the rapids run over me—then I shot out.

"It's a matter of principle with me," said the Doo-

little, stuffing some makhorka in his pipe. "I never pass up a good place to bathe on the chance that there might be a better place further on. Usually there ain't."

While we were waiting for the pack-horse to come up—the entire load had shifted—I washed a towel and a shirt. The Doolittle washed his socks. Then Don Quixote came along and we left the road and struck up a horse-trail into another valley. It was alpine, carpeted with flowers, shining in the warm sun. A grouse got up and thudded away from us. Kolya nearly put me in the stream. Near the top of this pass we were joined by a mounted mountain guard and an old Karachaite. And if I ever saw a strange sight it was these two armed men lying down among the forget-me-nots and buttercups. We had halted for luncheon, sharing our cheese and eggs with them; and the little foal which had been running free beside the Karachaite's mare lay on its back and rolled in the grass. Then it sighed and went to sleep. They were, said the Karachaite, bound for the capital of Karachay. If the weather held they would make it in two days.

But the head of that craggy palisade, Little Bermamoot, was already threatening to lose itself in a snowstorm. The weather was " getting thick." Zigzagging up a smooth mountain-side, we came to a summit from whence we could look down over fifty miles of the Caucasus. These were the lower ranges—green and smooth as velvet. I could see the shadows of the clouds floating over their magic carpet. Beneath the distant clouds was the hard grey of rocks, the jagged mountains, serrated with the white snows of their

ravines. Up here we found an occasional Karachaite shepherd, sitting his horse in solitary grandeur, a veritable sentinel on the mountain peak. They were wrapped against the chill winds in their square-shouldered black burkas which they use for both cloak and bed. When the wind blows from the right they shift the burka around so that the opening is on the left; if dead ahead they shift it completely around. It covers both the rider and the horse from saddle backwards. These shepherds always rode up to us to shake hands, exchanged the gossip of the valley with Don Quixote, and asked for a cigarette. Their little black Caucasian sheep formed the only break in the green of the mountain-side.

Up here in this emptiness, where horse-trails faded into pathless grass, we encountered other horsemen, bound for various destinations in Karachay. Some were bound for civilisation as represented by Kislovodsk, and they rode in their finest black boots, as soft as a glove, with no soles on them, with silvered daggers in their belts, white hoods dangling down the backs of their wasp-waisted black tcherkaskas. Arrogant dandies of the mountains, they rode their horses into each other by way of frolic on meeting.

And one of them, with the thin, hawk-nosed face of an ancient Persian—their faces were already changing!—raced past me with a yell which set my horse off at full gallop along the steep mountain-side. Ya Allah!—it must have been the Prophet that held me in that soft-padded Circassian saddle. Kolya leaped a small gully and came to a full stop. The Karachaite sat there, waiting for me.

I then suggested to this descendant of Timur that we have a quiet smoke. As I held out the case the wind blew three of the cigarettes out of it. They fell between us, and the Karachaite leaned down easily from his saddle and picked up two of them. But as he reached for the third his saddle slipped, and he fell—his one hand already on the ground—as lightly as a cat.

A little later, when we were jogging along, as if to wash out this stain on his prowess, he leaned down and picked me a buttercup.

CHAPTER XLVIII

AMONG LOST RACES

"AH, Dadushka, Dadushka!" cried Djhon-hote, on this dawn. "It will be a fine day!"

The Doolittle, who was beginning to resent the way these swaggering Karachaites always called him "The Old One" or "Grandfather"—just because of his grey beard—refused to leave his flea-bag. And when I tried it I found that Djhon-hote, who had taken my soap yesterday without asking for it, was now walking about in my only pair of shoes. As the Karachaites have the habit of cementing their stone huts with manure, I decided that shoes were necessary and asked for them. "Nu vot!" grinned Djhon-hote, pulling them off his bare feet. "May I have your razor?"

I told him he most certainly could not. It was my last principle; there were three things, I said, which a man did not loan another: his toothbrush, his razor—or his wife. He was a bit piqued about it at first, but then gave way to that grin which endears one to these Mohammedans, and began calling me "Dear One." I went down to the stream for my morning bathe in pure ice-water.

It was my first cloudless view of the main Caucasian Range, its snow fields glistening under the warm sun. Kolya and Marusha, our two horses, did not look as

if they had moved during the night—and they were still eating. I did not blame them, for the grass and buttercups in this untravelled valley looked as fresh as a salad. The freshness of the Caucasian woodland is almost unbelievable. The opposite hillside was forested with scrub oak and the pines I had seen silhouetted against last night's moon, and under their cool shade were bright clumps of azaleas and tiger-lilies. The flats of grass by the stream were gay with buttercups, forget-me-nots and white star-like flowers like wild narcissi. Our side of the mountain was dotted with mountain birch, gnarled and shimmering in the warm sun. And the delightful thing about a Caucasian birch forest is the absence of dense undergrowth—just the trunks of white, lichened birch, rising above the lush grass. The shadows are like plush on the green floor. Blue and white butterflies flit over the orange lilies and wild roses. The forget-me-nots lie in carpets. Shafts of wild iris tremble beside the swift streams—streams that are copper-green in the pools and white as cotton where they plunge down through their rapids. And above it all lie the white, glistening snows.

We rode towards them, stopping at one pool to swim and have a try for some trout. " I'll cook all you catch," grinned the Doolittle, lazing in the sun—a sun so bright that my fine gut cast looked like a rope in the crystal-clear water. Not a rise. (But I gave him thirty-five to cook one rainy sunset later on, which he did—curse him—in sunflower-seed oil!) We bathed and washed some clothes with a few twittering sandpipers to keep us company.

This part, going across the mountains to the little

Karachaite capital of Utsch-Khalan, was practically trailless and untravelled. But in one birch spinney we found a Karachaite family on one of their inevitable treks after grass, drowsing in the shadows beside their herd of brown goats. A little boy was watching the herd, the man was sleeping, and the woman—as usual—was suckling a two-year-old child. Infinitely pastoral. . . . We forded a stream here where Djhonhote, sitting on the pack-horse's rump, nearly got his second bath for that morning when his horse stumbled, belly deep, in the swirling water. The Doolittle, like a Japanese rope-walker, went across on one leg.

Down in the hot valley we struck a mountain road, and here, for an instant, I thought I was back in Spain. A pack-train of Karachaites, dark and swarthy under their flapping black sombreros, plodded by in the red dust with their line of wistful little donkeys, staggering under bulging goat-skins of sour milk, saddlebags, axes and family goods. The women, their mouths muffled against the dust, were each carrying a swaddled child. But in another valley, higher up in the mountains, I saw a Karachaite father tie his baby to the saddle; the child was weeping dolefully as the horse swayed down the steep trail, swung back and forth, its little eyes tightly closed, howling its grief. No wonder they can ride!

And here, in this valley, began the prelude to one of the most unbelievable nights I spent in the Caucasus. We picked up another lot of Mohammedans here who had brought their great grey cattle down for some grass. We went up with them to their mountain lip, riding with the grey herd through the deep forest of

resinous pine. The steep trail was so travelled that the roots of the pine were laid bare and squirmed and crawled like great snakes under our horse's feet. An old doddering Turco-Tartar, whose face looked as if it had been carved from weathered mahogany, was invited by one of the younger tribesmen to ride on his horse—an act of courtesy that was consummated with much bowing and genuflection. We were climbing to a green valley bowl that lay in a crescent of mountain peaks that were 10,000 feet high. And there were, said the Mohammedans, some fine bears in these woods.

I did not see any, and except for a few brightly painted woodpeckers, I had never seen forests so desolate in my life. I rode ahead, thinking how infinitely little the crowd of Mongols behind me had changed since the days of Ghenghiz Khan, heard in the stillness the hollow call of a distant cuckoo—like some magic bird that was directing me on my pilgrimage to an enchanted land—and then, lo! there it was! . . .

I had come out from the forest and found myself on a bowl of pure green. I looked down into it and saw thousands of sheep and goats, great grey steers, maned horses galloping furiously across the unbroken floor. A deep lake at the far end, cupped in dark pine; distant smoke coming from two little clusters of log cabins; three black spears of stone—the ten-thousand-foot peaks—and then a lip, where the bowl broke off short; and I found myself staring down into the blue and green ranges of the Caucasus that ran on for miles. Even now their valleys were blending in blue mist, their rock faces flaming in the dying sun.

The Turco-Tartars I had come with rode past me, crossed the bowl, and vanished again into the pine forest that held the far rim. And, still feeling myself under the spell of some mountain magic, I rode down to the log cabins, met a cluster of men almost twice the size of the Mohammedans who had just gone beyond; and the girl who poured water over my hands as I sat in the welcome ceremonial before their log fire had a thick plait of golden hair down her back and wide-set blue eyes.

CHAPTER XLIX

AT THE FOOT OF THE MAIN RANGE

WE made camp in an abandoned winter kosh at the foot of the main range of the Caucasus. A pleasant spot, with splendid isolation. The stream down whose valley we have been working during the hailstorms all morning still rushes past us, foaming over its shale ledges to the deep notch of pine forest below. Beyond, black and white, rise the rocks and snows of the main range. Snowstorms are swirling along its upper reaches. We see the white beds of ravines going up under the clouds.

The grass is deep and luscious in this uninhabited valley. Kolya and Marusha, our two horses, have been hobbled and turned loose to eat their clever little heads off. They eat all day long. Kolya, this morning, when we were negotiating a gorge where one of his feet placed eight inches to the left would have meant "cheerio" for us both—Kolya switched round his head to eat a wild iris. I like Kolya, but I wish he wasn't always thinking of his stomach.

The kosh is just a lean-to of rock slabs and sod-covered saplings placed against the face of a cliff. It is so old that the jagged rocks and roof beams are glistening like tar with the wood smoke of ages. A dark little hole, with no windows or chimney. As I

write this I am sitting out flat on the pile of sisal that takes up half the dirt floor. A log across the floor marks the end of the bed. Don Quixote has started a roaring blaze out of wet wood with one gum chip. The Doolittle has just taken off his shorts (imagine such things in a hailstorm!) and is holding them up before the fire. He is dressed in shoes and spectacles—and has just remarked to Don Quixote that it's a good thing it isn't last night's kosh—with all the women around. " Nitchevo," says Djhon-hote, " they wouldn't mind." A strange comment to make about Mohammedan women. I have just put on some rice to boil, hanging it over the embers in our teapot. And, unless my rice-cakes fail, this evening promises to be as comfortable a night as one could ask for.

This morning was an ordeal. The kind where you are drenched to the skin—and yet love every minute of it. We had counted on making an early start. But our Karachaite hosts in last night's kosh delayed us with a breakfast of corn-pone and the butter we had seen them making in a goat-skin. Then there was the matter of inspecting a Karachaite's smashed finger in the daylight. And after using up the last of my hydrogen-peroxide to soak off the cotton—and seeing the bone sticking out—I decided that my potassium permanganate treatment of the previous night was not good enough to stop gangrene, and urged him to ride full out the forty miles he would have to go across mountains to find a doctor. I felt rather insistent about this, because when I removed the bandage—telling him above everything else to keep his finger clean—his mother picked up the gory mess and held it in the

palm of her hand together with the naked seat of the latest baby. As a start in life I could think of nothing worse. But these Karachaites, God bless them! don't know what a germ is.

The crudity of these mountaineers' lives is shocking at times—especially when it is raining. They have to tend their flocks. As we rode down the cloud-drenched valley we saw them sitting on their desolate horses, cloaked to the eyes in bashliks and black burkas, standing guard over the bleating knots of their fat-tailed black sheep. Karachaite boys, barefooted in this downpour, raced their horses bareback along the steep mountain-sides in pursuit of wayward cattle. Karachaite shepherds stood guard over stone pens full of lambs. Their brutes of dogs, that in any other country would have been trained to assist them, seemed to have no other task than to lie outside the kosh doors and fly at all strangers. We saw Karachaites on the march in search of better grass; wattle pens already up for their lambs, fresh-born foals feeding beside their hobbled mothers, drenched children watching the stupid movements of long-horned grey cattle. The men, wrapped in burkas, sat in stolid resignation on the shafts of their awkward two-wheeled carts—carts full of women and children—sitting there waiting until the clouds left the valley so that they could resume their eternal march. These Caucasian uplands, flowered and green, a veritable paradise when the sun is shining, hold a miserable life when it rains.

When a mountain Karachaite comes in out of the rain it is to a smoke-filled dark hut, a bed of sisal on the floor, a bowl of sour cream or curds, some soggy

corn-bread—at the best a few times a year a bit of roasted sheep. He sits by the hot wood fire until the moisture steams out of his clothes; he takes off his moccasins and fills them with fresh straw—he never wears stockings—and he lies down to sleep, very often on the dirt floor, in the same black felt cloak that has shielded him from the rain of the hills. Drenched when it rains; that is why, perhaps, he so seldom uses water to wash with. The stream flows by, he might bathe in it, but it is unpleasantly reminiscent of the chilling rain.

But such a life was ours also for this night—and for many others. When you don't have to do it forever that puts a different face on it. The crackling fire that Don Quixote had started with one gum-chip was all the more delightful because it meant refuge from the storm. The bed of sisal meant a dry night's sleep, rolled up in warm flea-bags—a place to drowse and think and smoke. Clocks and hours stop in these isolated valleys of the Caucasus. The half-side of sheep, wrapped in one of Doolittle's shirts, would soon be purified by the flames and turned into succulent shashlik. Don Quixote was already using his long dagger for its legitimate purpose these days, hacking up the mutton to slide down a long skewer of wood. He sang as he worked, turning the roasting sheep over a bed of rose-red embers. From time to time he took it away and sluiced it with salted hot water. On other embers I have a fryingpan full of rice-cakes. I dust them with a little of our precious powdered sugar, add some raisins. . . .

The Doolittle puts himself completely at my mercy by melting the soldered handle of our teapot. He

forgot that it was not full of water. But he retrieves himself by repairing it with his trusty pliers.

The rice-cakes, for a wonder, are a success. The last I cooked were in the mountains of British Columbia eight years ago. Don Quixote is enthused with them. He picks up the hot rice directly out of the fryingpan and shovels it into his bearded mouth. His Tartar, high-cheeked face gleams in the firelight.

" What price civilisation?" asks the Doolittle, filling his pipe. Don Quixote makes a bed of his saddle-felts and a saddle. He wraps himself in his hairy black burka. The hairier it is the more distinguished, and Don Quixote looks like a square-shouldered bear. We throw on a few more sticks of firewood to keep the light going while we undress. And I go outside for a last look at the night. It has stopped raining now. The moon is lighting up the main range of the Caucasus. The peaks are hard and sharp; black, with ravines of glistening white. Our flowered valley is drenched with pale light. Marusha and Kolya, munching placidly, stand deep among the lush grass by the stream. I go into the warm kosh, slide in between two layers of my flea-bag, and use my warm flannel shirt for a pillow. I lie on my side, watching the dying fire as I smoke a last cigarette. . . .

I would go through many a drenched day for a night like this.

CHAPTER L

LAMB À LA KARACHAITE

IT was not, said the Doolittle, in accord with the principles of Western hospitality for our host, Adami Ezdonov, to give us his family bed, the best seats by the fire, all the sour cream we could drink —and then try to sting us on the price of a sheep. But this was the East, where Time begins. (" That's why you people in America have to hurry so much," said the Doolittle. " These people have used up all the Time before it gets to you.") And in this case we decided that if time meant nothing to Adami Ezdonov it should also mean nothing to us. We would hold out as long as he did. He had asked seven roubles for a sheep and we had offered five. After which we began to talk about the hailstorm.

" We've got to stick it," declared the Doolittle, as the hours dragged along. " If we give in now we are beaten all along the line. Djhon-hote (our guide) will tell all the other Karachaites that we are weak 'uns."

So we sat there around the kosh fire, the only light in their hut of stone and sod. Our host was squatting on his hunkers, watching our faces for some signs of softening. His wife, from a withered breast, was suckling a two-year-old son. There was something pastoral about that. Djhon-hote, who was capable of

talking forty minutes without letting anyone else speak a word, was reciting some blood-curdling tale of the hills—or the Communists—to the other Karachaite shepherds. The Doolittle and I made more tea. We seemed so satisfied with it, occasionally nibbling a rubbery bit of Adami's tasteless cheese, that the old man began to crack. He said if we would wait a minute he would go along the kosh and speak to another khassain proprietor. He came back smiling, and said that khassain would let us have a sheep for six roubles. We said five—and began to talk about going to bed.

" Six is cheap," said Djhon-hote, his mouth watering for some mutton. " In the bazaar you would have to pay eight; six is cheap for the mountain."

" Five," said the Doolittle.

There was, it seemed, a bargaining cul de sac, from which neither of us could back out. Adami seemed adamant, and in all seriousness the Doolittle and I did really begin to arrange our beds on the pile of sisal, feeling a little gaunt over the thought of the nice crisp mutton we might have eaten. But Adami wasn't going to lose five roubles. Just as we began to undress he suddenly thought of another khassain. He went out in the night and stayed there ten minutes—and when he returned he had miraculously acquired a sheep for five roubles. The other khassain, said Adami, had just returned to the kosh. A palpable ruse to save his face.

He brought the lamb in by the fire and showed it to us. All right? He took a whet-stone and sharpened his knife. " Good Lord!" gasped the Doolittle; " he's

going to kill it in here!" But then Adami took the live lamb and knife and went outside. I followed him. And there, in the grey night with the black bowl of hills all around, he cut its throat and drained its blood into a copper saucepan. Then he brought it inside. First he hacked off its fore-legs. The tendons cracked. Then he slit the skin on the stomach from head to tail. Then he hung the carcass from the main wooden support on our dirt-floored hut. He pulled off its skin as if it were a shirt. A fine fat-tailed sheep. One boy—his face black with soot—sharpened a stick and cooked a fore-leg on it over the embers. Another took the decapitated head (with the fur still on it), stuck a sharp stick up the nostril, and began to toast that. Fifteen minutes ago the sheep was alive. It was now paunched, and our host was busy cutting out some of the choice bits of its inside—liver, heart—his forearms glistening with blood as he worked the sharp knife.

During this operation we were served with a strange cooked cheese, filled with butter, over which was a corn-bread crust. Sweet-sour gummy stuff. It was cooked between two iron pans, placed face together in the embers. We ate it by breaking off a piece of the crust and scooping out the rest of it with crust and fingers. Daggers loosened up the bits that stuck to the bottom.

The blood of the sheep ran down the pole. The eyes popped like chestnuts in the roasting head. The child took out the charred head and scraped it with his knife. Adami Ezdonov took a huge iron pot and hung it on the chain that dangled from the sod roof over the fire. He began to throw in chunks of sheep. He uses

a wood block he has just been sitting on to chop up the lamb's spine. He does it with an axe, wiping it on his boot between each stroke. He washes the toasted forelegs and throws them, skin and all, into the boiling cauldron. Then he takes the charred head and with his knife he slits the cheek skin, tears off the lower jaw and throws that into the pot—teeth and all. It reminded me of once, in Aragon, when I was eating a Spanish mountain sheep in the dark, I felt something crunch, and found a loose tooth in my mouth. . . . Not mine, I discovered after counting them, but a sheep's. Adami Ezdonov then took his axe and split the sheep's head, which he also consigned to the bubbling pot. He pulled the char off its fat tail—also into the pot. Good Lord! I wondered, what next!

The girls, in their flowered bloomers, helped in this ritual; and I saw that they had little silver rings on their forefingers. Crescent of gold for earrings. One of them, with arched eyebrows and face as slender as an almond, poured water from a long-necked copper urn on Adami's bloody hands. Her eyes were grey-green. But in a few years she would be as worn as the old hag by the fire who seemed too parched to be giving the breast to her two-year-old child.

When the big black pot boiled, and the bubbling foam rose, Adami scraped off the dirty discoloured suds with a stick. He swept it off into the ever-cleansing fire. The sheep was cooking. . . . The men began to smile and roll cigarettes. Their women, in the shadows, formed a little bed of white turbaned heads. They began to sing. Strange hesitant little songs, while the men hummed in different keys. The women

sat under suspended saddles and silvered bridles. Adami took his sharp stick and prodded for a bit of lamb. He chewed it—not ready yet—and threw it back in the pot. More salt. . . . More wood. . . . The flames lighted up the soot-blacked stones and stick roof. We lay stretched out on the bed of sisal. The old hag stripped the entrails of the sheep and tied them in bow-knots. Soon there would be hot meat for all of us. Let the hailstorm lash our sod roof.

Adami took off the pot. The steaming bits of sheep were placed on a split log. We took them in our fingers, tearing at the bones with our teeth. Our hands were greasy. The slender girl stood before us, the copper urn in her silver-ringed hand, pouring a thin stream of water into our cupped palms. We washed ourselves. Djhon-hote spread out his saddle-cloths and used his saddle for a pillow. I crawled into my flea-bag, and as I lay there, lazily smoking a last cigarette, I heard the women eating whatever of the sheep we had left.

CHAPTER LI

WOLF-FIRES

SHUT up as they have been for centuries among the mountain pockets in the Caucasus, the Karachaite shepherds there have developed—or maintained—a distinct code of what to them constitutes the best manners; they are, too.

When you arrive at their mountain cabins by horse or foot the chief men come out and stand in a group around the amputated tree that always serves as both hitching-post and meeting-place for their settlement. You dismount, and they shake hands with you gravely. If you don't talk Karachaite (as I don't) they engage in casual conversation with your man. No sign whatever is given that they intend to invite you to stay in their cabins; and perhaps this preliminary palaver is an ancient form of inspection, providing a loophole in case they wish to refuse you, for, once they have asked you to be their guests, they practically give you their home.

Then, while you are standing there—very often in a deep rain—you become aware that two or three of the younger men are unloading your horses. You must not try to help. Yes, you inform them, you have come across the mountains from Khassaut; and tomorrow morning at six o'clock you are going to start off for

Utsch-Khalan, their capital. Please. . . . One of the sheep-herders, who has either volunteered (or been selected) to offer you his cabin, leads you to its door. The fierce dog that always lies there at its entrance flies at you, and he beats it off with a stick. You go into the log cabin.

And there you see what is very likely another reason for this palaver around the hitching-post; for it is obvious that the entire contents of the family bed in one corner of the dirt floor have been removed to make room for yourself. Streaks of damp on the packed earth show where a woman has been sweeping before you. I have been in many koshes (mountain encampments) and—with one exception, the first, which was the dirtiest hole I have ever slept in in my life (and I have slept in a chicken-coop)—this general tidying up to make their home fit for the guest was invariably the same.

Inside they ask you to sit down on the log which marks off the bed from the rest of the floor. By the log is the fire of kindling, built on the dirt floor, its smoke going out through a wattle chimney or chinks in the shake or sod roof. And among the glowing embers, as you naturally arrive at these mountain cabins at the close of the day, the one hot dish of their day is being baked—a foot disc of grey, soggy, steaming corn-bread. But they do not give you this to eat immediately upon your arrival. That they eat with you, in company, squatting on their haunches, plastering the poor-tasting bread with watery butter made in a churn of goat-skin. First they give you the ceremonial bowl of thick, lumpy, sour milk. And the fact

that this wooden bowl is passed from mouth to mouth, with whiskers, and often strangely diseased faces, buried in it deep and lustily, does not encourage you to take more than your first ceremonial and comparatively untainted quaff. A row of milk-dripping moustaches is cleaned with sucks, lip-smacks and wipes with the backs of grimy hands, and you are a member of the family.

I arrived this way one night at a mountain kosh in the Caucasus, where, as I have written, the inhabitants were such as I had never seen before. There was an Arcadian, "Evangeline" simplicity in their cleanliness and rugged features; a complete absence of the Tartar or Turk in their wide level eyes and the blond fairness of their womenfolk. They might have been the descendants of some far-wandering Norsemen, migrants of the Don or Dneiper; but it was useless to speculate on their ancestry. It was lost in the mists of antiquity, the wars and wanderings of races that had left this seed to take rest in this rock-rimmed refuge in the upper ranges of the Caucasus.

In the winter they lived in one of the little sod-roofed villages that lie deep beside the mountain river that shoots down to the Kuban below those towering peaks. In the summer, for three months, they live with their herds in this mountain-bowl, which at 8,000 feet was like a lip, a shelf along the ridge of the world looking down into the ocean of peaks and valleys that stretched away in deepening blues to where the snow fields were glowing in flakes of purest rose in the flaming sunset of the main Caucasus. A lordly sense of space and grandeur was given us, which

might in many ways account for the superb stature of these eagle-like mountaineers. Lords of the crater that held the key to such beauty for three months of the year, it would be a small-souled race indeed that did not come to feel itself supermen.

They were prodigal with their background, the dark well of pine forest. The cows, goats and sheep were herded for the night in great corrals made of entire tree-trunks. The flocks of bleating kids were hurried up from the grazing bowl by their boy shepherds, each satyr-faced little animal rushing to its mother. The great grey bulls and bullocks were allowed to stray and roam through the dew that turned the great bowl to silver in the moonlight. The women of the kosh went down among the cows, and I heard the sound of half a hundred udders being milked. Lights appeared from the always open doors of the log cabins. The voices of young girls came in snatches of plaintive song. These cabins were made without the use of any saw, from whole tree-trunks, without any chinking between their knotted lengths; and the wood fires inside them glowed through open spaces like the ribs of monstrous skeletons. The fires were lighted at the four outposts of the settlement to keep off the wolves.

I thought they were joking at first, but Ismail, my host, told me that the wolves had taken three sheep only two days ago, leaping over the barrier of sharp and jagged tree branches that were placed like a barbed-wire entanglement against them along the forest-side of every corral. We walked around the village circumference in the night; and as we came to each roaring watch-fire—made of entire trees—we saw

بیر وه سرمایه صاحیبلاری اینقیلاب ایچن چالیشان قهرمانلاری آغیر أشکه نجه‌لر آلتندا ئه زییورلر.
ملك وسر مایه‌دارلار انقلاب اوچون چالیشان قهرمانلاری آغر اشکنجه‌لره سالیرلار.
بایلار وپولدارلاره اینقیلاب اوچون گورهشه‌ن قهرمانلاری آغیر عذابلارا سالیالار.

the youths who stood there as wolf-guards. "A hero!" smiled Ismail, patting the shoulder of a bashful boy shepherd.

This, said Ismail, was his life. He had grown up beside the wolf-fires. But he wanted to see the world. Down in the village he had delighted in the new school that had come with the Revolution—it was the gate into the open world; but his father was a Kulak. He owned great herds of cattle and employed men to work for him. Ismail, although it was the one thing he had dreamed of, could not continue in the school and become a professor. The sons of Kulaks cannot attend school until all the poorer boys have been cared for. So, what did he do? Ismail purposely made himself poor.

His father sold his herds and went to work as a clerk in the village co-operative. Ismail went with the few sheep they retained and watched over them himself in the mountain. The road was clear now—he was twenty-four; he would go to school again during the winter. From his bed on the dirt floor he dug up a book—a French-Russian grammar. We sat there by the firelight and he read out certain words to me—tried to make sentences. His great, simple face made me think of my school-book version of the boy Lincoln.

He talked to me of the Russian writers he had delighted in—Tolstoy, Lermontoff, Gogol and Pushkin; he asked me what New York was like, Paris, London and Berlin; and I told him, while the wolf-fires glowed beside our log cabin in the Caucasus.

CHAPTER LII

IN A KARACHAITE "KOSH"

A DAY that had begun in sunshine and romance was ending in rain and desperation. Murky clouds buried the lower ranges of the Caucasus; hail cut us in the face. Twice we had stopped. Once, when we had seen an encampment of Karachaite shepherds, hoping to find shelter—only to find them sitting stoically in their burkas beside outspanned carts full of pain-immune women and squalling children—and again, when unable to stand the slash of sleet, we had dumped all our duffle on the ground and squatted on it, huddling under the two felt burkas that we possessed between the three of us. With my clothes sticking to me, I reflected dolefully on the lives of the Karachaite mountaineers. I also cursed the Doolittle.

Two hours back we had heard that weird bee-like braying of lambs, and seen a mountain kosh in a plateau among the hills—a stone and sod hut where the Karachaites spend the summer months with their flocks. Djhon-hote suggested that we had better drop down to it, but the Doolittle, still feeling full of beans, insisted on continuing our pilgrimage—there would be another kosh further on. There must be; these mountains must hold plenty of koshes. Two hours, with the Doolittle slipping and slackening, night draw-

ing on; and we found a Karachaite in the cloud. Yes, he said, there was a kosh "down below." He was driving four bulls. There is no use dwelling on it, that wretched trek along mist-drenched ridge and mountain-side, with my shoes squelching water in the stirrups, and the shepherd, wrapped in burka and bashlik, riding ahead of us. I pondered, as I rode, on the various restaurants I had known. If only there would be a warm fire and something to eat after all this. . . .

Then the shepherd began to zigzag his horse down the slippery grass mountain-side; I heard the squalling of lambs; and there, down below, I saw a few circles of stone and a long ridge of sod—from which came blue smoke. A kosh! There was a mountain stream down there and a gully with a single log across it for a bridge. And as we halted, wondering whether to ride the horses through water or try to lead them across that slippery passage, a group of hooded men emerged from the stone wall of the kosh. Their faces were hard and firm, high-cheeked, generous-mouthed; and their hands, as we shook them—each one in turn—were rough and dirty. It was a ceremony, it seemed, that we had to go through with. You cannot ride out of a cloud and into a kosh—not without being invited. They eyed us.

We were asked to come in. I rode my horse down the gully, through the swirling water, and up the bank. Then I left it. As a guest of the kosh I daren't do anything more. They unloaded for us; they carried in our bags. They beat off the fierce dogs that flew at us, and we found ourselves in a low, stone-walled hut

that was as dark as a tunnel. Then these Karachaites ran for their firewood; they threw on logs that they must have carried for miles. The kosh flamed. There was no chimney, no window; the fire was just laid on the dirt floor against the stone wall. The smoke was sucked out through a hole in the sod roof. And as the flames rose I saw a ring of strange faces around me: an old woman, her head wrapped in a scarf like a turban, suckling a baby; an oval-faced girl who was leaning forward trying to pull off my boots; a row of children, dirty with soot beyond all description; and the face of my host. To see a face like that, lit by flames! Semitic, sensual, and smiling. . . . He had his youngest child between his knees. It had been eating sour cream; its face was covered with it, and the father cleaned its hands by rubbing them with his own. He sat there on a stump of log, beside his hearth, watching us for fear that we might not find pleasure in it, find it too humble, while his womenfolk brought us wooden bowls of sour cream, cheese, and slabs of soggy corn-bread. Their bed was a litter of sisal piled in one corner from which the whole family had cleared in order that we might lie down. They sat amongst saddles and tubs of sour milk, the women in the shadows, while we passed the bowl of sour cream from mouth to mouth. We all drank deep. As I drained the last of it—dirt and all (for courtesy makes you do such things with primitive people), our host sighed. He took a cigarette from us, made some jocular comment about the hail to another Karachaite—and the tension in the kosh was dispelled.

The soot dropped from the birch-saplinged roof as

we hit it with our heads. From bitter cold we were soon in danger of being scorched. As the fire mounted we had to lie farther and farther back on the felt blankets over their sisal bed. A massive-featured Karachaite sat beside me. A girl held a copper urn while he washed his hands and feet. Then he stood up and began to murmur; he was praying. He knelt down and touched his head to the ground—twice—in the direction of Mecca. He stood up again, murmured his prayers, and then bowed to touch his head to the ground again. An orthodox Mohammedan. He propitiated Allah while we discussed our dinner. In the shadow (the Mohammedan women are always there) two girls were making butter by shaking cream back and forth in a goat-skin. A Karachaite youth was brought into me with a smashed hand. He had had his finger crushed between a tree and a rock, an entire month ago. It was festering and gaping. . . . I thought I saw bone. I dug into my kit and found potassium permanganate, asked them did they have a cup, filled it with hot water and the antiseptic, stuck his terrific finger in the purple fluid. The boy was utterly impassive.

We killed a lamb, and as we sat there, eating the hot meat from the iron pot, I glimpsed a calf in the section of the kosh next to me; there were five families divided by wattled walls, and in the one beyond I heard a cream separator going. Cream from the separator and butter made in a goat-skin; our host giving us his bed and the best bits of meat—and his wife and daughters eating what we left—this was where West met the East.

The girls sang for us as we lay in the sisal. Flutter-

ing little songs, while the men hummed in different keys. The songs always ended in sadness; then notes broke—like falling leaves. Only one song had a lilt to it, and I asked what it was. A girl whispered what it was to her young husband—she had a face like the Vladimir Madonna—and he, laughing at such absurdity, translated it to me, it was the song of the freedom of Mohammedan women under the Soviets—the New Life.

And as I fell asleep, wrapped in my flea-bag on the sisal, the girls and men stretched themselves out on the floor. The girl with the face like the Vladimir Virgin was watching solicitously over a rather strident young Karachaite whose head lay next to mine. A Sam Browne belt and revolver proclaimed him as a Young Communist. He talked of America, and, like other Karachaites, asked me if New York was in Berlin. No, I said, and neither did I agree with him that Hoover, out of desperation, would recognise the Soviets just at present. I was rather admiring him for a few minutes as a life-line to the new Karachaite life from the old until he said:

"You are not a Communist, eh? Well then, let me tell you something. Unless America recognises the Soviets—if you are not a Communist—you will not be allowed into the U.S.S.R."

It was time, I thought, to go to sleep.

CHAPTER LIII

MEN—AND MISHAPS

THERE was only one occasion in our wanderings among the mountain shepherds of the Caucasus that we were refused hospitality; and this, I feel sure, was greatly due to the miserable disposition of the Karachaite guide that we had picked up in Utsch-Khalan. A whining fellow, always moaning about something being wrong with his spine and worrying about what we were going to do to his saddle-galled horses, who took this occasion to do a bunk and get away from us.

On this night we had come down to a mountain-shelf from a pass which the map said was 9,800 feet high. Maybe it was—there were clouds a-plenty around and below us while we were up there—and this shelf was as cold as the Arctic. It was the one night, unfortunately, when we would have been willing to sleep under a crude roof no matter how dirty the floor was. But " Spine," as I now called him, put up such a whining show of it to the owners of the log cabin that we held no cast with them. They regarded us suspiciously and left us to make a tent out of my ground-sheet as a refuge from the dew-drenched grass.

" Spine " was too stricken by his malady to even collect wood for our fire, much less roast some lamb

on a spit to make us shashlik; so I cooked rice and raisins over a meagre fire. Djhon-hote, our former horse wrangler, would have had these Karachaites stepping it, and sour cream to spread over the roasting meat—because Djhon-hote liked such things himself. When the "Spine" groaned and lay down to sleep behind our miniature tent, wrapped in his felt cloak, the black burka, with his saddle for a pillow, I suspected that he would try and desert us in the morning.

He did. And here, after various arguments, we got a local shepherd and two horses. The shepherd also was ill, complaining of "fire in the stomach"—probably the common affliction of worms—and his mare, which I was given to ride, also had her four-days-old foal with her. A miserable combination that gave me all the sensations of riding a quick-lunch. For the mare, stopping to eat whenever she could, always had the foal running up to her for more breakfast, luncheon or dinner. At other times the beautiful little foal ran just ahead of its mother's fat legs, always threatening to trip us and send us bouncing down the mountain-side.

But our shepherd was either related to, or a friend of, every other shepherd in the adjacent valleys; and the next night, after a day of ascending and descending mountain-sides, we came to another isolated cluster of stone huts in the sides of a gorge, where the owners of the best hut turned out *in toto* to hand it over to us, where we bought a whole sheep, and where we lay by the hearth-fire full to drowsiness with a dinner of mutton roasted on wooden sticks and sweetly

garnished with a coating of rich cream. The corn-cakes in this kosh were hot and light. And here, squatting by the primitive fire, I met the finest specimen of Karachaite manhood I had or ever would see.

A superb specimen, a good six feet high, broad and deep-chested, with every line and feature of his bronze face the apotheosis of the ideal Mongol aristocrat. Talking not a word of each other's tongue, his eyes were quick to grasp the expression on my face; his laugh and white teeth flashed at every chance for humour. And yet, twenty-four years old, the figure of some ancient princeling, he was afraid to take a cigarette from me in front of his father.

Here, in one of the thousand isolated pockets of the Caucasus, we had stumbled on an untamed type of patriarchal existence—the tribes of the Old Man. The teaching of the Communists might have begun to penetrate into the villages; the emancipation of women, slow as it was, might have been started down there; but here in this distant valley the women were thought as little of as the animals—even less—and the first son of the leader was obedient even to his habits to the Grand Old Man. Allah was still worshipped with bows—an absolute following of the Koran. And when the Doolittle and I shared our wine with the other Karachaite, this splendid young Mohammedan discouraged our offer with a laugh. When the sheep was killed it was the father who came to administer the knife-stroke that cut its throat, leaving his son and another retainer to do the ugly work of skinning and disembowelling. They would not eat a piece of meat that had not been bled to death. And

a pig around such a Mussulman community would have probably resulted in the sudden illness, if not the death, of the man who dared to bring it there.

There was, in fact, something very close to a battle on that mountain-side just before dawn. A tribe of Karachaites had come over the pass with their herds in search of fresh grass; another tribe, as it happened, had just come up the valley for the same purpose; and they met on the plateau just above our stone huts. Now these grazing lands in the mountains have a complicated form of ownership. In a sense they belong to no one at all. But it is the unwritten law that those adjacent to a village are sacred to its own horses and cattle. So much so that a stranger coming to town is not even supposed to graze his own horse on them. And the mountain-lands are, if held at the moment, the hereditary rightful grazing-lands of that particular kosh. Therefore it came about that while the two strange bands were beginning to get further from words and nearer to daggers in their argument, our own princeling—with his Grand Old Man—appeared in their midst and told them to clear out. . . . We woke to the laughter of the young princeling and the triumphant voices of our own clansmen. Our own guide, the chap with "fire in the stomach," being the only neutral among them, had been acting as a peacemaker. He grinned at us and slapped his Daghestan knife: "I made them shake hands," he said.

It was understandable why this valley life was so remote and unspoilt; for above, its only entrance was this snowy pass and below was one of the worst trails

شەری آزادلغی اوچون چالیشان قەرمان ایشچی وە کویلیلەری دمیر پنجرەلەر اردندا چوریترلەر.

شری آزادلغی اوچون چالیشان قەرمان ایشچی وکندلیلری دمیر پنجرەلر آردندا چوریترلەر.

گۆندوعار خالقلارینك آزادلغی اوچون چالیشان قەرمان ایشچی وە دایخانلاری دەمیر کوزەنەکلەر ایچنده ساقلیالار.

I have ever seen. It went down in slippery little surfaces along the sheer sides, and then became merely a series of footholds among a chaos of glacial rocks—rocks so formidable that nothing less than dynamite could shift them to make a better trail; they were almost protection enough for the coveted grazing-land. But Karachaite horses, men, goats and cattle, cannot be stopped by anything much short of the vertical among the wild mountains in which they and theirs are born and die.

For the foreigner it is not quite so pleasant. I did not like the habit of the foal always trotting just before its mother's legs. I did not like the solicitation of the mare, which paused once or twice as we were balanced on a tickly place, to see that the little foal was getting time to scramble over it. And I wondered what would happen to that tiny animal's slender legs if the worst should happen—which it thereupon did!

The trail, which had often been merely a ford along the rocky bed of the stream, was here a broken ledge about eighty feet above the water. Ahead was a slide of a few feet down the slippery surface of a huge rock. An easy thing for a man to negotiate, but difficult to coax a horse into trying. I had dismounted to pull my horse down when, to my despair, I saw the foal trot along the narrow path of the soft hill soil to nuzzle its mother. It slipped, of course, and I tried to seize its tail as it went over. A gesture that left me standing there, wringing my hands, as the delicate little creature went bumping down among the rocks. But it landed, as if directed by some providence, flat on its curly tail on a ledge soft with grass and butter-

cups. It stood up, shivering, and gave a frightened cry. I felt a push behind me, an answering whinny, and was just in time to stop my mare from trying to climb down the mountain-side to reach her child. She strained there, her forefeet part-way down the slope, and wept with mother grief.

The Mohammedan, who had seen this all from further down, came along the mountain-side like a goat, leaping from rock to rock, and took the sobbing foal in his arms. We all trembled, the mare and I and the Mohammedan, while he went over the foal for broken bones. We were reunited as a family further down, the mare carefully licking the foal to see if everything was all right. And as we rode down through the dense birch forest that almost immediately closed upon us, old "Fire in the Stomach" and I felt drawn together by reason of our common fright. The foal was all right, thank Allah!

He touched my hand with the heel of his in token of thanks and understanding as we lighted cigarettes.

CHAPTER LIV

STYMIED AT THE KLUKHOR PASS

I AM 9,000 feet up in the air—in more senses than one. I am lying on my duffle, dumped on the grass above the snows of the green glacial lake that lies at the last 300 feet of the Klukhor Pass. The Klukhor, over which I meant to climb out of the Caucasus and down to the sub-tropical shores of the Black Sea, is reputed not to be free from snow until August. I tried to take horses over it on June 27th. Hence my present position, seated beside a waterfall that drops over a mile into the valley below, a frozen lake at my back, grey cliffs and a greenish glacier behind that; and a night ahead of me without fire or even a tent—all because of a little gap of some twenty feet.

This gap is the break in the overhanging snow-shelf that rims this side of the lake, through which the ice-green water pours over the lip of its waterfall, fine as spun silk, to form one of those foaming white rivers that thunder down through the pine and beach forests of the Caucasus. It is possible for a man to drop off this overhanging snow-shelf and wade through the lake outlet without any trouble at all. But while the snow-shelf held us—we tried it—it was too ticklish a spot to risk horses which are worth about 300 roubles

each. At the present moment the actinic rays of the Caucasian sun are boring into my head through my hat (some Russian scientist, experimenting with a tunnel, declared they could go down through the earth for two miles!), and my feet are wet with the snows I have been tramping through, trying to find some way around this beautiful but indomitable glacier lake. (The pools of melting snow on its surface are emerald-green.) We gave it up, and Yusef, my Mohammedan, has gone back with the horses.

I saw him while I was making my tea trudging across the snow fields a couple of thousand feet below me, going down to a kosh in the pine forest below to tell the two Russians there what we think of them for saying the snow and ice was strong enough to bear horses, and to bring back another Mohammedan Karachaite to help carry my kit, which, being selected for a pack-horse, weighs a good hundred pounds. We shall be our own pack-horses. He is also under orders to bring back some firewood—we are well above the timber-line up here.

My tea, by the way (and how I wish it were coffee!), was made with my penknife and a board which I found sticking out of the ice by the lake. I did not ask how it got there. It was wet. I whittled a pile of shavings, dried them in the sun, and then I built a tiny fire between two rocks, on which perched the black tin kettle. I ate four of our eggs. Then I lit a cigarette and started to think. . . . It was no use; if Yusef doesn't come back with another Mohammedan I am stymied. I sat there, watching the waterfalls pour out of the sullen glacier, silent on a peak in the Caucasus.

But the mountains, once my ears could hear past the waterfall, were full of strange sounds. A dull thud, as if an approaching boot had struck a rock, and I whirled to see a section of the cliff break off, bounce, bound, and come spinning down the terraced faces until it lost its momentum in the lake snows. Hollow booms come from the glacier, but its greyish-green face is impassive. If it moves, to see it, I would have to watch it for years. I hear other waterfalls pouring down the vertical face that holds the glacier. Streams white as cotton course down the lichened limestone cliffs on my left. Wherever I look my eyes meet the broken bowl of mountains. Chacha, one of the highest peaks of the Caucasus, is directly opposite me across the emptiness ending in my waterfall. Its sharp tip is black and cold, flecked with white snow.

A few clouds appear behind the jagged mountains, raising grotesque heads, as if watching. . . . The sky has been a flat blue, vivid, with a sun so hot that it scorches my hands. Then a grey mistiness pours silently over the sharp crags behind the glacier. They tear it, show rents of blue; and then it closes over, resting, anchored on the grey peaks. The sun slides down behind the limestone escarpment; old Chacha fills with blue shadows—and I am bitterly cold.

The Klukhor Pass is the highest point in the old Sukhum military road that was built to exterminate the Caucasians, who, aided by their wild mountains, did not surrender to the armies of the Tzars until 1865. By that time, as a race, they were practically destroyed, and the road lost its purpose. Today, as you follow the road, you come to places where it has

completely chipped off from its cliffs. You have to lead your horses along the glacial rock-scrap of the steep mountain-sides, go down into valleys and climb them again. Above me, like a mockery around the almost vertical mountains which form the back-drop of this glacial lake, runs a straight line. This is the road, cracked off for long stretches, lying under slopes that bury it in others twenty feet below the steep slides of snow. Its lower stretches climb through dark pine forests where the rocks are deep with spongy moss, and there are still said to be a few bear.

I slept in a kosh last night, a shepherd's log cabin, in a flowered alpine valley that was once the bottom of a prehistoric lake. The man was away, taking a sick Russian down to a doctor in Teberda. The Karachaite woman knew no Russian, but she gave me a cake of hot corn-bread, baked in the embers of a fire that was built on the dirt floor. It was one of the poorest shepherd's cabins I have ever been in. There was not even a hole in the shake-roof for the smoke to go out. It blew out instead through the gaping logs which formed the walls. There was a gap by my head between two logs that was a good eight inches wide, and the dog tried to come in through it during the night.

I awoke this morning at six o'clock and tried to catch some trout. I wanted to get them when the sun rose over the mountain to warm their crystal lake. The Karachaites say that is when the trout play. "You can see them jump!" But they could also see me—it was a dead calm—and every fly on my cast. Water so clear that it was like looking down through air. Then, the trout failing, I did the next best thing—

I took a swim. Swam out into the cold water of the lake, and then raced back. I dried myself in the morning sun and ate multitudinous eggs and tea. That was this morning . . . just twelve hours ago.

It is six o'clock now. The sun has gone down behind this bowl of mountains. The clouds are sinking down over each peak—coming down to sink me—and there is no sign of Yusef and that other Mohammedan. I feel both sad and mad.

CHAPTER LV

MAN PROPOSES . . .

YUSEF and the other Mohammedan did come back. They found me lying under my groundsheet among a square of rocks 300 feet below the frozen Klukhor Pass. And I was freezing too.

I had found some "solid heat" in my despatch-case, and by burning seven tablets I had succeeded in making a cup of tea. I had rigged up a semi-tent with the remnant of the wet board found in the glacial lake, and I was lying under this, with a candle, trying to read through until dawn. It seemed impossible to sleep with one's spine like a stick of solid ice. And we found it so, for aside from an occasional doze we lay there and shivered until the rocks began to turn light, while the dew fell so heavily on the black felt cloaks of Yusef and the other that they lay beside me in the moonlight like glistening black bears. The clouds that filled this crater of peaks in the hours after sunset soon drifted away. The night was set with stars. The cliffs of snow and rocks are like skeletons of black and white. The moon fills them with its strange liquid light.

Morning came, a sky of mauve behind the high spear of Chacha. A light blue along the eastern cliffs as the dawn came, then a glow of faint pink. But the

lighting is pale and cold. The ground-sheet flutters in a chill wind. The sun is still a long way down below the bend of the world. At three o'clock we could begin to distinguish the upper rocks; and a bear or ibex started a slide down the slope. At four we smashed the board and made a fire for tea. The Karachaites dried the snow moccasins over it and filled them with our little store of dry sisal. These moccasins had ganglions of rawhide sewn along the foot rim—to get a foothold in the shifting snow—and how useful they were I did not realise until I started to cross the snows in my ordinary low shoes. I would have given considerably for a pair of " snow-gripping " moccasins on those deceitful slopes.

We felt like sitting up on top of the world as we finished that last meal. Then, with the sharpened sticks they had brought up last night, we started to cross the snows. A fall for me off the snow-shelf into the glacial lake was the prelude to this day. We climbed the other shelf and around the sixty yards of snow face that makes that rocky corner the hardest part of the whole pass. A slip there, and a stick hurriedly jammed into the snow, stopped another fall that might have been serious had it gone on. Then the long climb up the unbroken snow that blankets the whole Pass. We felt here that the worst of it was behind us; there was nothing to it now but the long trek on the other side until we would find some shepherds and horses. A walk, perhaps, of two days.

But the other side held disillusionment. There was no trail. The snows went to the cliff edge and then

dropped sheer into a valley that was as white as a bowl. We could not get down. In casting about for some way to get around this impassable barrier of sliding snow we went down a little island of rocks that ran down its face; and here we tested our luck. If we should slide off the snow and go down to the valley it might not be so bad. But if we slipped and went over the next cliff, almost directly below, it would be no good at all. We selected two boulders of equal size and shape and sent them careering down the snow-face.

The first, gaining momentum every instant, thundered down the snow slope, splashing the soft snow like spray as it came down between flights, and rolled the entire way across the frozen bottom of the valley and part way up the opposite slope. Impressive—but comforting. The next, started on precisely the same course, shot down us and over the cliff. . . . An experiment which, as far as we were concerned, settled the argument.

Man proposes! . . . There is no use dwelling on the disgust and humiliation of having to turn back, the abysmal gloom that filled one's soul, nor the feeling of uncertainty and doubts about one's own self that plagued me when, on the snow fields further down, I met a party of three men going up to the pass. Two of them had gone over it the previous year, and they smiled when my Mohammedans told them about this year's snow—the worst that one of them had seen in fifteen years. I lay in the sun among the pine trees down below and drank the drugs of defeat. If those other men went over. . . . But they came back—

اینقیلاب ایچن کوره‌شه‌ن قه‌هرمانلارڭ قانلاری به‌ده‌لینه بز «موپری» ته‌قویه اینمکله مقابله ایده‌لم!

انقلاب اوچون چالیشان قهرمانلارڭ قانی عوضنه بز «موپری» قوتلندرمك ایله جواب ویره‌لم!

اینقیلاب اوچون گوره‌شه‌ن قه‌هرمانلاریڭ قانی به‌ده‌لینه بز «موپر»ی قوه‌تله‌ندرمك ایله
جاواب بیره‌لییز!

trooping down the trail from the glacial-scrap just at dusk. They agreed with us now. And so did the Sukhum mountaineering doctor who had already crossed the pass three weeks before—before the snow started to melt. And so did twenty-four Leningraders who had come all the way down here to do the same stunt. We lay there without appetites around our log fires and cursed our luck.

Morning, and the long ride back down the mountain road. Dreary now. Back to Teberda and the Doolittle, sitting by the window of our little board-room which he had in splendid isolation already turned into his usual shambles. He grinned.

" I knew you were coming," he said. " The ' Mountain Wireless ' got the word down last night that you could not get over. I expected you before this."

I slid down from my horse and told the Doolittle how Yusef had been chasing our horses all the previous afternoon—they had wandered up a tributary of the river—and then I flung myself down on the wooden bed, enduring the remarks of Yusef's father. The ice-shoes he would have provided to bite through the soft to the hard old winter's snow, the steel-tipped alpine stocks. . . . So sensible, they seemed, in this warm valley. I swore.

" Bless my soul!" cried the Doolittle. " What are you feeling so sick about? Man proposes and God disposes—this is the Caucasus."

He had, bless his heart, bought a bottle of champagne to welcome my return. He had bought a big bowl of wild strawberries. We ate them. The Doo-

little, who is fourteen years my senior, raised his glass:

" The worldly hope men set their hearts upon . . . Ha! Ha! Well, young fellow-me-lad, this all goes to show you. You can't buy a railway ticket over the mountains of the Caucasus."

CHAPTER LVI

THE NEW PRIESTHOOD OF RUSSIA

THE Communists say there is no God; they laugh at priests and priesthoods, and yet theirs is one of the most austere, indefatigable and unself-seeking brotherhoods in the world. If it is not a religion—which term they despise—it is a cult. And however brutal and horrible their methods have often been, there is no getting away from the fact that they are solely devoted to the service of mankind, as they see it.

There is a general idea in England and America—at least, I think there is—that all Russians are Communists. Not at all; the Communists are a very esoteric little body, to which not only is membership exceedingly difficult, but precarious even when you are in it. A Communist has to keep on his toes the whole time or he will very soon be dropped out again. They are the whippers-in, the task-masters—the slave-drivers, if you will—of the most ignorant mass of peasantry in the world. A hundred and twenty million peasants almost bestial in their stupidity.

During the days of the Revolution in Petrograd, 1917, where things were so chaotic that people didn't know where their next meal was coming from—or the

next bullet—a Russian said to me, as we watched the populace racing through the streets:

" They have let out the sheep from the pen, and now who will ever put them back?"

The Communists are doing it. They have been doing it since the day the Nicholas station went up in flames in 1917, whipping the Russians into battle against the armies of Denikin, Judenitch, Wrangel, Kolchak, Petkura, Pilsudski—the private vendettas of England, France, and Mr. Baker of America—and they are doing it now, eleven years after, thanks to the fact that those futile expeditions held the internal factions of 1917 Russia together like a hoop holds the staves of a barrel, and gave the Russians the one thing they could not give themselves—co-operation, making the Red army a National army. Thanks to that, the Communists, the vanguard of the proletariat, are now disciplining a country which covers one-seventh of the globe.

And the other six-sevenths of the world has, perforce, been damning them ever since. Damning them so violently and with such hate that the truth has long since been lost count of in the mass of accusations and refutations, so that today, to get any real idea of what a Communist is, you have to come to Soviet Russia itself.

I was surprised, therefore, to find that only one out of about every hundred Russians was a Communist. I was surprised to find them a brotherhood amazingly similar to the Jesuits. Similar, not only in the fact that for them the end always justified the means, but for that resoluteness of self-denial and sacrifice which

made them an order of missionaries sent out by their Party to whatever part of the world they thought would be most useful to the great purpose — the battle against Capitalism. And so, in Nijni-Novgorod, I talked with a young Communist, six of whose friends had just been despatched into Siberia to work among the peasants—an actual exile; and in the black steppe below Kiev I talked with a young school teacher, sent into this miserable village from Leningrad, who talked with us in perfect French, lamenting the fact that it had been " necessary " to send her young husband to another village, hundreds of miles away, to stay there all the long winter.

Then there are the ten People's Commissars in the Kremlin, living in the palaces of the old Tzars, with servants and seclusion—and a fleet of twenty-five Rolls Royce motor-cars. Their actual salary might be limited to the Party maximum of £21 a month. But a cool £200 per month could not bring them the things their position there gives them. And when we bumped into one of those ten Big Men of Russia, the Commissar of Transportation—who had come all the way down the Volga from Nijni-Novgorod, 1,500 miles, in a private steamer of the river engineering department—I found that his party had commandeered the entire first class of the steamer I was on. This gave me an actual sight of some of the " spoils " of office under Communism.

But these spoils were legitimate. The Commissar was not hoarding. Whenever the time comes for him to relinquish his high office he will have accumulated no money from it. He merely has the right to certain

perquisites. And these, perhaps, help to answer that oft-asked question: " If the Communists are limited to a maximum salary of £21 a month—and they can't be working for money—what on earth can they work for? What's the incentive?" The answer is: Position, Power and—strange as it may seem—for a disinterested love of their cause.

In the Russian villages today it is not always easy to be a Communist. The Kulaks—rich peasants—killed quite a number last year. Some of these far-off Communists come pretty close to being heroes. In one village of fifteen hundred souls outside Poltava, for instance, there were only four Communists and six candidates. In another that we drove into under the shallow bars of sunset one night, a cluster of thatched roofs among the birch wood and pines, a desolate sight with the evening crows perched on another forest of rough wooden crosses on the rim of its black steppe, we found a Young Communist, twenty-four years old, the president of the local Soviet.

He was a rough young peasant in sheepskin coat and fur hat and heavy black boots. He slopped about with us in the mud. He showed us the school, the co-operative and the church. It was still " working," he pointed out, although only the old people went into it now. A mass of heavy peasants followed us about, forming a ring around us whenever we halted. They loomed up there, bearded and sinister in the gathering gloom, expressive of all the dark peasant ignorance that makes them do such cruel and unreasonable things. The boy's face among theirs was pale and eager. He was trying to explain us to them

and them to us. They growled like bears behind him, and one or two who were drunk tried to fling him aside.

"Please!" he begged, trying to bring order out of the dozens of questions they were hurling at us at the same time. They listened, and then they shouted again. We shouldered our way out of the mob of them, drove off, left the thatched huts among the dark pines, the crows flapping off the graveyard crosses to join that great nightly Hegeira that circled above us like a cloud in the red sky . . . left the Young Communist still pleading with the people of his village.

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